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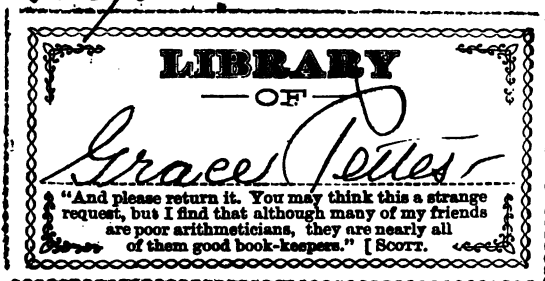


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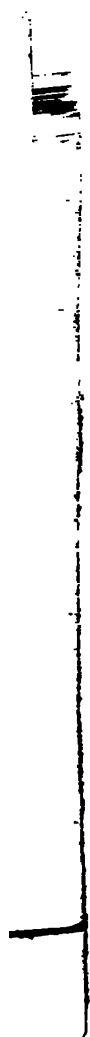
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PATRICIA PLAYS A PART

PATRICIA PLAYS A PART

BY

MABEL BARNES-GRUNDY

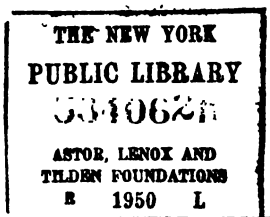
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Dedication
TO THAT IMMORTAL TYKE
THE HOAXE

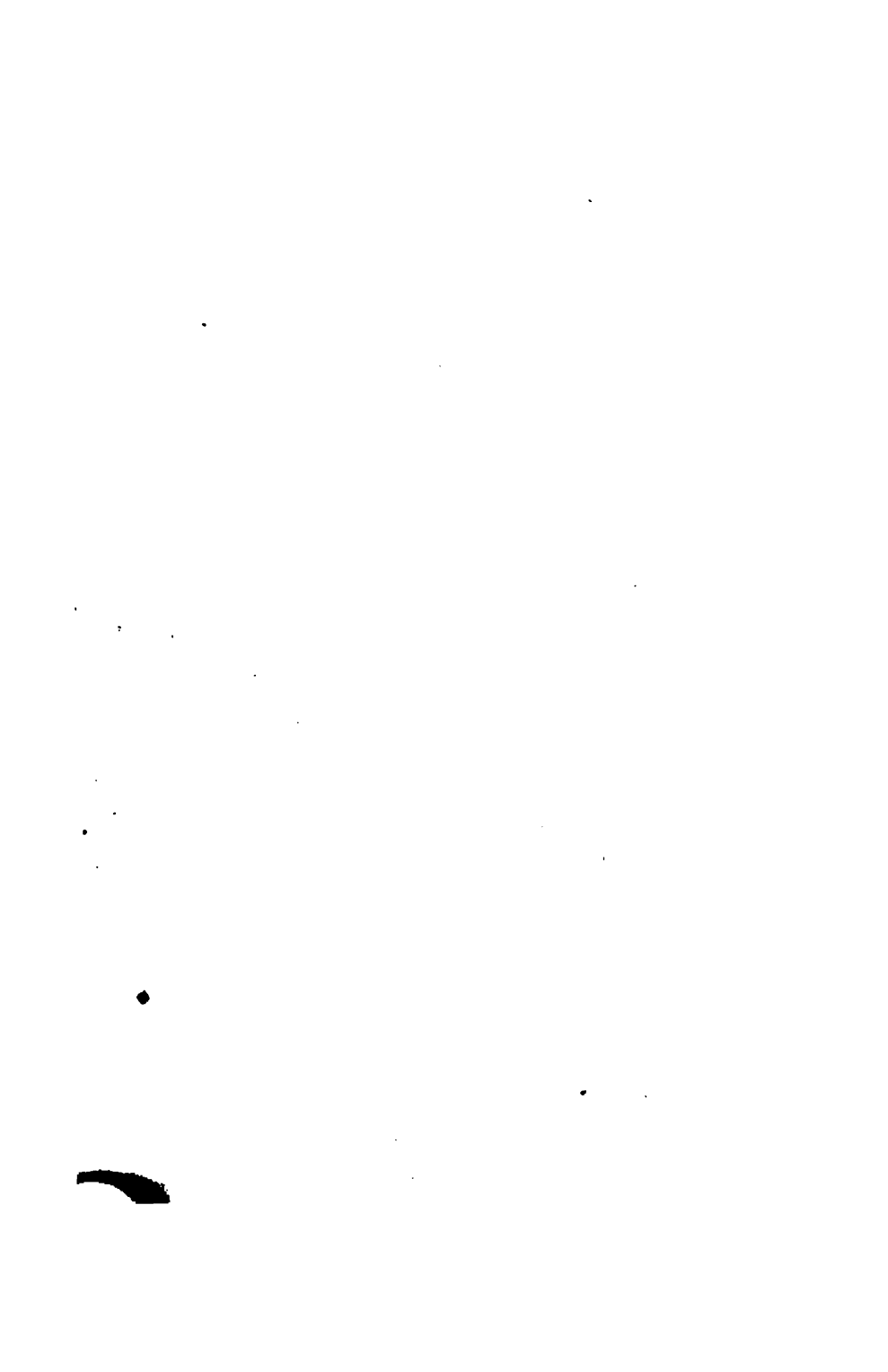
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PATRICIA PLAYS A PART

.



CHAPTER I

IN WHICH PATRICIA PRESENTS AN ULTIMATUM TO HER
AUNT JOHN AND COUSIN MARY MOFFAT

“**A**RE you listening, or have you both suddenly become deaf?”

Patricia, as she put the question, flung herself with such force on to the Chesterfield couch in her exceedingly handsome drawing-room, that her aunt, Mrs. John Moffat, gently rebounded at the other end.

“If you *have* heard me, at least it would be polite to make some effort at a reply. If you object to what I propose to do, say so. If you are merely indifferent to my movements, still say so. Only speak—do something for Heaven’s sake!”

Mrs. Moffat, when she had steadied down at her end of the couch, placed a marker in her book—a book written by just a “Plain Peeress,” but which had been affording her most delicious thrills this bleak winter afternoon—and heaved a deep and prolonged sigh. Life with her niece Patricia was never monotonous, to say the least of it; life at this particular moment seemed fraught with exciting possibilities—at any rate, for Patricia; and her obvious duty—Mrs. Moffat felt—was to *do* all in her power to prevent these possibilities from ripening into realities. But how should she find strength?

She looked at her daughter Mary for guidance and help, but Mary appeared to be in no mood to guide anybody. She glanced at the ceiling for inspiration; a lethargic, weak-legged winter fly crawling staggeringly across its whitened surface brought her no assistance; she peeped furtively and longingly at the "Love of Lady Ulrica" by the aforementioned "Plain Peeress" and Patricia surprised her in it. Then she heaved another sigh and stared at a large pink *fleur-de-lys* in the conventionally-patterned carpet.

"Are you going to speak?"

This time, of her own volition, Mrs. Moffat gently bounded on the couch. Patricia's voice had been almost a shout.

"Of course I am, my dear Patricia, if you'll only give me time. I'm going to speak now, at this very minute, this exact minute. I should have spoken before but you so took my breath away, so amazed me, so—so—horrified me that no words would come. Let me say at once that I . . . I consider your proposition not only outrageous, but almost immoral, and I am sure Mary will agree with me in this. Don't . . . don't you, Mary?"

Aunt John Moffat invariably finished her sentences on a note of interrogation, just like the apex of a cypress tree. Is it not Bagot, in his guide-book to the Italian Lakes, who calls attention to the perpetual interrogatory condition of cypresses?

Mary Moffat rose from her low seat by the fire as a servant entered the room with a large tray, full of glit-

tering silver, and, taking the box of matches he offered to her, lighted the spirit-lamp beneath the tea-kettle with her customary delicate carefulness of movement. Then, waiting till the hot scones and cakes had been arranged on a small table and the man had withdrawn, she said with an amused and affectionate glance at her cousin: "Patricia always *has* done exactly as she likes, and I expect she always will; won't you, Patricia dear?"

"In a sense, yes," said Patricia, "though I have always consulted you or Aunt John or Cousin Julia first about my every movement. Now, haven't I? I always take your advice."

"In the letter, certainly, out of respect to your dead father's wishes. In the spirit——" Mary paused to pour boiling water on to the tea.

"In the spirit?" prompted Patricia. Mary had contracted a habit of leaving a sentence, however exciting, unfinished till the psychological moment when she considered the tea sufficiently brewed.

"In the spirit—no; unless the advice we have proffered has happened to coincide with your own wishes."

Now this was not true, and Mary knew it was not true. She also knew that her mother and Patricia knew it was not true. Patricia, on the whole, considering the wilfulness of her disposition, the independence of her spirit, the position she held in the county as one of the most desirable of its heiresses, had been fairly docile and tractable in the hands of her aunt and cousin; firstly, because she loved them; secondly, be-

cause Aunt John, being easy-going and vacillating by nature, one felt bound to give in to; and thirdly, because Mary, being calm and gentle and firm—a firmness almost amounting to obstinacy—one felt equally bound to give in to. Yet Mary made this astounding statement.

Patricia looked at her reproachfully. Mary averted her eyes. When Patricia looked like that it was difficult to withstand her. Mary needed all her strength and firmness and diplomacy to cope with the proposition which Patricia had just offered to her and her mother for their consideration. In plain and unvarnished language she had just announced her intention of going abroad alone, unchaperoned, unattended even by Nannie, her maid, to a cheap, second-class *pension* or hotel to study the life of the middle-class, impecunious section of society, develop her own character and gain experience. It was an astonishing proposition and an equally impossible one. To make clear to Patricia how utterly impossible was Mary's bounden duty—and Mary never shirked her duty; she was courageous by nature. Once put her hand to the plough she never turned back; she went on ploughing till not an inch of land remained untilled. But somehow, to-day, she felt less strong than usual. There was a look of deadly decision in Patricia's blue eyes to which she was unaccustomed, a set of the mouth which caused her to feel tired before they had even entered the arena of battle, a squaring of her shapely shoulders which reminded her forcibly of the shoulders of her Uncle Pat-

rick Hastings, Patricia's father, when confronted by his workmen on strike.

Patricia, after handing hot cakes to her aunt and cousin, had taken up a position on a footstool on a white bearskin hearthrug with her back to the fire and, with a *foie gras* sandwich in her hand, looked defiantly at Mary. Aunt John didn't really count, dear though she was, because she invariably thought as Mary did. Mary was the trouble. She might have the prettiest, sweetest mouth in the world, but it was also the firmest. Her brown eyes might be of the most melting, velvety softness, but Patricia had known them take on the appearance of steely marbles. Patricia always felt Mary would have made an excellent queen of the Victoria type.

She met the belligerence of Patricia's glance now with one of assumed amusement.

"Have some more tea," she suggested, "it will give you strength."

Patricia intimated that her cup was not empty and she felt as strong as a lion.

Mary laughed and blew her a kiss.

"You look most interesting and attractive sitting there."

"Do I?" said Patricia.

"You've not really made up your mind, have you? A made-up mind in a woman is most—alarming, and always terrifies me into fits."

"You must face the fits," said Patricia drily.

Mary made a little *moue*. "But, dear, it's so mon-

strous, so impossible, so almost immoral, as mother suggests!"

"I only propose doing what you have already done."

"The cases will not bear comparison."

"Why?"

"You know why."

"I do not."

"*You* are a wealthy, inexperienced and most attractive heiress. *I* am just poor, plain Mary Moffat, with a wide knowledge of the seamy side of life and accustomed to fend for myself since I was put into short clothes."

"Plain! Mary, how *can* you say anything so untrue? Poor you may be, but *not* plain." In her vehemence poor Mrs. Moffat allowed her plate and a piece of angel cake to slide from her slopy knee to the floor. "Is she, Patricia?"

"Indeed she's not, though I'd like to be able to say she is, because she's so tiresome. . . ." Patricia rescued the plate, and, fetching a brass shovel from the hearth, scooped up the crumbs.

"That's the worst of Fuller's cakes," remarked Mrs. Moffat parenthetically, "they're so crummy."

Patricia kissed her on the top of the head, supplied her with more cake and resumed her seat.

"Whatever you say or think of Mary, Aunt John, you know I agree with you, save in one point."

"And that?"

"When you regard her as being just firm and ex-

hibiting remarkable strength of character, I know it's nothing of the kind."

"What is it, then?"

"Pig-headedness—plain, unadulterated pig-headedness."

"I wonder," said Aunt John thoughtfully; and then, "Perhaps you're right."

Both the girls laughed.

"She's going to be pig-headed now. Look at her mouth, the hard, unyielding look in her eyes, the dogged set of her jaw. Aunt John, won't you be on my side just for once and help me?"

Mrs. Moffat looked worried. She glanced at Mary, then at Patricia, then back again at Mary. She loved them both so much. Of course, Mary was her own daughter, and it was her duty to love her best; but Patricia had always been so kind, so truly kind to her. The suggestion she had just made was, at first glance, an impossible one, but still . . . girls did such things in these days. Perhaps, after all . . .

"Now, it's no good your beginning to yield and Patricia beginning to wheedle," said Mary inexorably. "This thing's got to be argued out on sensible lines. But I want to finish my tea first. If *you* do not require strengthening, *I* do. I know what Patricia is when she's once started."

And Patricia *had* started. Suddenly she dropped the half-bantering manner she had adopted and, putting down her cup, she crossed to the window and drummed on its panes with impatient fingers.

Her eyes saw not the wintry landscape set before her: the dull grey sky, the low line of hills in the distance, the white road which led in a straight, unattractive line to the small town of Burnt Hollow three miles away. She saw not the haystacks and hedges and fields of her own well-kept property, nor the long, finely-gravelled carriage-drive, flanked on either side by magnificent elms, which swept up with such a curve and flourish to the front doors of the old Elizabethan house of which she was the mistress. She saw not her gardens or spreading lawns, the rustic summer-house and well-built conservatories, usually the pride and delight of her eyes. Momentarily her vision was obscured and she had wandered away to a land of sunshine and flowers, of blue seas and skies, of olive groves and mimosa trees of which she had read, and heard so much from Mary—a land of brightness and clear light set along the azure coast of the Mediterranean. And in this land she saw herself *alone*: unchaperoned, unattended. That was the great point—she saw herself *alone*, without any responsibilities, any of the cares that follow in the train of wealth, any of the hangers-on, sycophants that money brings. She saw herself free of engagements which became so tiresome at times: the dull dinner-parties she dare not refuse for fear of giving offence to “the County,” the dull garden-parties attended by the same “County” in its best clothes, eating strawberry ices to the accompaniment of uninspiring strains from the local band. Certainly there were golf and bridge, which she liked; but bridge in a village does not usually

attain to a high-water mark of excellence; and Patricia was a good player.

Her hunting, too, she enjoyed, and she was a fearless rider. Then there were her five dogs to exercise—which dogs invariably suggested in most flattering language that one walk with their mistress was worth five with a stolid groom, which pleased Patricia, who liked to be liked by animals. But still . . . but still . . . life, which she had spent for so many years in the village of Little Wyfleet, near Burnt Hollow in the County of Essex, and which up to now had brought her so much happiness and quiet contentment, had suddenly become irksome to her, suddenly become a thing of weariness and dissatisfaction, stifling and narrow.

Still more loudly she drummed on the window-panes, and tapped impatiently on the floor with her slipper. When would Mary have finished her tea, and why couldn't she eat a little more quickly just for once? Couldn't she realise that she, Patricia, was in a mood which, had she been a man, would have led her to take up her bed and walk across the fields and far away, far away to a land unknown, encamping on a river-bank or amongst the serene mountains "under a wide and starry sky"? She and Mary had always been such friends, such close friends—friends in the real sense of the word—that Mary must appreciate the fact that a crisis had arisen in her cousin's life; not a whim, a desire, a sudden mood to be dismissed with a few light words, but a crisis, a real stern crisis worthy of consideration and immediate attention.

The drumming became so loud and insistent that Aunt John, after gazing reproachfully at Patricia's back, looked beseechingly at Mary. Mary was the only person who could do anything with Patricia when she became "difficult." Cousin Julia, Patricia's nominal chaperon, but who was half the year away drinking waters and taking "cures" for rheumatism, usually fled to her room when Patricia was anything but her normal, docile self; but Mary was not like that, she never ran away from things. Now, returning her mother's look with a reassuring smile, she shook the crumbs from her lap on to the hearth, extinguished the flame of the spirit-lamp, and, crossing the room to the window, linked her arm through Patricia's.

"What is the matter, Pat? Anything special happened to upset you? Another proposal, eh?"

Patricia nodded a little grimly.

"Dear me," said Mary. "So soon again! Why, the last was only about a month ago."

"I know," sighed Patricia wearily; "don't rub it in."

Mary laughed, and pressed her cousin's arm. "Come and sit by the fire and tell us all about it. We love hearing about your proposals and the knock-out replies you give to your suitors, don't we, mother? Who was it this time?"

"Antony Elwick."

Mary started. She started so violently that she nearly knocked over a small table in her passage across the room—she and Patricia were still arm-in-arm—and though she recovered herself quickly, the movement had

not been lost upon Patricia, who turned and looked at her curiously. Mary's cheeks, usually so pale, were flushed a deep red and her lips were quivering, whilst her whole small face worked with emotion. She met Patricia's look with one almost of defiance; then, pausing and withdrawing her arm, she stooped and lowered the wick of a lamp which in no way needed this attention, and the next moment she was mistress of herself.

"Antony Elwick!" Mrs. Moffat was plainly surprised. She had taken from a work-bag an unattractive-looking piece of embroidery, to which she felt it her duty to devote her time and attention one hour each afternoon; then, conscience salved, she would return to her Lady Ultricas and their naughty doings with a satisfied smile of "something achieved."

"Yes!" said Patricia, resuming her seat in the centre of the white skin hearthrug with her back to the fire. "I was surprised too. I thought better of Antony. We had always been such friends. It—hurt a bit!"

"What did you say?"

"What I have said to all of them; perhaps I put it a little more delicately because I like him and I was ashamed for him."

"You mean you refused him?" Mary's head was bent low over the intricacies of her crochet pattern.

"Of course!" Patricia's tone was surprised. "Antony is no more in love with me than I am with that brass fire-shovel on the hearth, and his relief was enor-

mous; he could scarcely keep from skipping with delight. It would have been comical if it had not been pathetic."

"Poor Antony," said Aunt John, without knowing why she pitied him.

"Exactly, but still poorer Patricia."

The soreness and bitterness in Patricia's voice caused Mrs. Moffat to feel uncomfortable. She didn't like people to be sore and bitter. She liked everybody to be happy and jolly and light-hearted, especially people she was fond of.

"Well, that's all finished with," she observed soothingly. "Another chapter closed, and you and dear Antony can just be friends again."

"And that's just what we can't be," said Patricia with asperity, "and you know we can't; there's the rub. I said some pretty straight things to him—things that made him wince; things that caused his kindly, humorous face to become long and thin and full of shame. We can never be the same."

"What did you say?" It was Mary who put the question—Mary with her head still bent over her work, and her face as calm as a perfectly unruffled pond, and her voice as even and toneless as the ticking of an eight-day clock, and which yet caused Patricia to look at her long and earnestly.

"I said," she replied gently, after finishing her scrutiny, and as though wishful of saving the absent Antony as much pain as she could, "'I am sorry you have done this—sorry for both our sakes; but I know it is

not your fault. You have always been a dutiful son. Lady Elwick should be touched by your devotion and self-sacrifice; but she must look elsewhere.' ”

“ And what did you mean? ” Aunt John was clearly mystified.

“ What did I mean? ” Again Patricia's scorn sprang out. “ I meant that some other girl's dollars must bolster up the decaying fortunes of the house of Elwick, not mine.”

“ But——”

“ It's no good your saying ‘ but,’ no good your trying to defend Lady Elwick and Antony. They have done an unpardonable thing, and I thought they were my friends and that they liked and respected me, and it hurts. Oh, how it hurts! I could have forgiven anybody but Antony; we have known each other since we were little children. We have played together, slapped each other, bumped each other's heads against the wall, confided in one another, quarrelled, fought, made friends again, danced, walked, golfed, hunted, been real boon companions, and then—he comes and insults me by making love to my money-bags!” Patricia broke off to fight tears, which were very close at hand.

“ Do you know how many offers of marriage I've received in the last twelve months? ” she demanded, in so loud a voice that Aunt John dropped all her working materials to the floor.

“ Ten,” she hazarded.

“ No, not quite so bad as that—seven. Seven men have proposed to my fortune; seven men have made love

to my gold; seven men have murmured honeyed words to my estates."

"But I am sure one or two of them have cared for you for yourself. Don't you think so, Mary? You get such ideas into your head. Mr. Gillingham, now—I really *do* think he was fond of you."

"You flatter me," said Patricia drily.

"But I am sure he was." Mrs. Moffat was genuinely distressed. She wished Patricia would resume her normal bright outlook on life. "Mary, don't you think Mr. Gillingham was really in love with Patricia? I know he wore green socks and ties because he heard her say she liked them."

"Mr. Gillingham would have died for her; he would have done more—he would have shaved his much-cherished moustache, stood on his head, or worn green goloshes, had she expressed a wish that he should do so," said Mary. "I never saw any young man so badly hit."

"There!" observed Mrs. Moffat triumphantly. "I knew I was right."

"He would not have wished to marry me had I been penniless," said Patricia obstinately.

"Have you no faith in your own attractiveness?" Mary laid down her crochet-work, and kneeling on the rug beside Patricia, stirred the fire to a blaze.

"None whatever. I might have if I were poor. Perhaps I am as attractive as the average girl when she is young; but no man, even if such attractiveness exists, is able to appreciate it, for men only see me through a glamour of gold. They would like to like me, but they

can't. They are prejudiced before ever they meet me. Their antagonism is aroused before an introduction is made to me. 'Oh, the rich Miss Hastings!' they say, mildly excited; for are they not younger sons with inexorable fathers and a heap of 'accounts rendered' and piled-up debts? 'Let me see; her father made his money out of soap or sauce, wasn't it? No? Tin-tacks! Vulgar, I suppose, or sidey or airified? No! Must be plain or stupid, then. Anyhow, give me an introduction and I'll judge for myself.'

"And because I know I'm being judged, weighed, sized-up, I become miserable, nervous, and sometimes, I'm afraid, very rude. And I'm oftenest rude when I'm very near to tears. I long to cry out: 'Good gentlemen, my father, Patrick Hastings, was one of the finest men that ever walked this earth—one of the gentlest, one of the kindest, one of the simplest and one of the most honest. He made tin-tacks, but he made them well. None of your blunt, knock-kneed, feeble tin-tacks, that double up at the first blow of the hammer, but a good, sound, self-respecting tin-tack, that can be driven home cleanly and securely. And he was sympathetic towards those who, through no fault of their own, were failures, never refusing them help; and he looked after his work-people, and feared God and honoured the King, and used his money well and generously. Do you do as much, you mean, small, snobbish, poor-spirited, fortune-hunting, slimy worms?' " She paused, breathless, whilst Mrs. Moffat and Mary, astonished at this outburst, gazed at her mutely.

"Yes," said Patricia, nodding her head, "I feel quite as bad as that about it all. I've pretended I haven't cared; I've laughed at these fortune-hunters, snapped my fingers in their faces, made light of their insults—yes, insults—but I've minded horribly. Oh, if I could but meet a man who, believing me to be without a red cent, could yet learn to love me for myself!"

There was silence for a moment or two. Mrs. Moffat and Mary saw that Patricia was not play-acting, that she was genuinely and strangely moved.

Presently she got up from the hearthrug, and brushing back the tumbled hair from her forehead, she shook herself vigorously, as though casting from her something unpleasant, and smiled upon them; and when Patricia smiled, Aunt John said she simply felt as weak as water and unstable as—as a man in the Bible; she was not quite sure who, but she fancied it was Reuben.

Now she braced herself to withstand the smile. She could see that Patricia was about to renew her attack and her absurd and almost wicked proposals to go off by herself to some wild and foreign land and do wild and wicked things, so she set her teeth and assumed an air of complete isolation from the scene around by gazing steadfastly at a cedar tree on the lawn. But she could never maintain an attitude of detachment for long, and almost at Patricia's first words she abandoned the cedar tree and took her niece into her line of focus.

"But why do you want to go alone, and why do you want to go on 'the cheap,' as you term it? That is what I fail to understand."

"Because I wish to see a side of life with which I am unfamiliar. I want to gain experience, to take my turn with the rough and tumble of the world, to learn to do a few things for myself, and—perhaps to learn to do a few things for others. I'm afraid I'm selfish."

"Not so very," they assured her with warmth.

She looked at them with a wry little smile.

"Indeed, we've often wondered you are as unselfish as you are, considering the way you've been spoilt since the day of your birth," pronounced Mrs. Moffat. "First, there was your dear mother; then, when she died, your father and Nannie; then when your father died——"

"There was nobody," said Patricia a little sadly.

"My dear Patricia, what about Mary and me and Cousin Julia and Uncle Tom and Harry? Don't any of us count?"

"Of course you do—forgive me." Patricia knelt in front of Mrs. Moffat and stroked her hand. "You have all been good to me, too frightfully good."

"I don't know about that," said Mary; "but, you see, we have all been fond of you, Patricia."

"Well, don't announce the fact in that surprised way."

"No," said Mary musingly, "but we might not have been. We might have suffered from most horrible envy, hatred and malice. You see, you have had so much and we others have had so little. Imagine my feelings when we were small girls, and you were decked out in velvet and lace and lovely sashes, and curls streaming

down your back, and I was attired in plain homespun——”

“Never!” cried Mrs. Moffat. “You never wore such a thing as plain homespun in your life. I don’t even know what it means, and always connect it in some strange way with John the Baptist; it is the sort of material one feels he ought to have worn in the wilderness. And you always had curls, and you know it, Mary—lovely long, brown, silky ones I twisted round my fingers.”

“Yes, but they were manufactured with the aid of paper and rags. Even there Patricia had the pull of me. Whilst I, at night, wore the aspect of a horn-ed unicorn, Patricia looked like—— What did you look like?”

“Can’t say—never considered the matter; and we are again getting away from the subject. You may keep trying to put me off,” said Patricia impatiently; “but you know I shall keep on——”

“What subject?” No one could have been more innocent than Mary.

Patricia fairly shook. “The subject of my at once leaving home and going abroad alone, unchaperoned, in search of——”

“A husband.”

Patricia was less angry than Mary expected. Indeed, she remained quite calm and unmoved.

“Put it so if you like,” she said evenly. “I don’t mind, and in part it’s true.”

“There are no men abroad.”

"Oh!"

"At least, no single ones."

"Indeed!"

"No, there are only women, especially in the cheaper hotels which you express a desire to visit. For every man you meet on the Continent—single or married—you meet squads of spinsters and widows—regiments of them, battalions. There may be a few German men, who take up a lot of room and drink beer, or Americans, who are engaged in looking after their own women-folk, or Frenchmen, with long, flowing beards, and equally long, pointed boots, whom you try to avoid even seeing; but there are no Englishmen, and even if there were, they'd only get up at four in the mornings and tear up mountains and try and break their necks."

"I see," said Patricia.

Mary regarded her cousin thoughtfully.

"It is strange," said she.

"What is strange?"

"That I have known you all these years and yet know you so little."

"In what way?"

"In your keenness for men."

Patricia flushed a little. "I was unaware that I *was* keen."

"You have admitted it yourself."

"When?"

"Just now. You admitted that you were going abroad in search of a husband."

"I did nothing of the kind. I said I wished to go

in search of change, experience, adventure, and the development of my character; and if, incidentally, I should meet a man who could learn to love me for myself alone—myself, with all my faults and weaknesses and without a penny to my name, living in cheap *pensions* and practising all the little economies poor people are compelled to practise, why, then—I should be very grateful to him.”

“And you would marry him?”

“Certainly, if I loved him.”

“I did not know——”

“You did not know?”

“That you were so anxious to be married.”

“Neither did I.”

“But you appear to be.”

“No, I am not anxious; I am not even impatient. Some day I should like—I shall hope to marry. All normal girls who are honest with themselves look forward to marriage; they look forward to it from the age of—say—twenty, till they arrive at fifty; then they stop; they have become tired and a little hopeless. Marriage is not for them; they must take up some other work; they must make the best of things and be as cheerful and happy as they can.” Patricia, with her hands folded on her knees, gave utterance to this profound truth with an air of extreme solemnity. “But I believe in marriage only where there is love to sanctify it, and I also believe that I shall never find such love as long as I am known to possess riches.”

“And abroad you believe this will not be known?”

"Exactly."

"And that marriage may follow."

"Precisely; though I had not formulated such an idea till you put it to me so directly; and I want you always to remember that I am neither keen nor impatient."

"Humph!" said Mary.

"My principal reasons for desiring to go abroad, as I have stated before, are to gain experience of how other people live, and to get away from importunate money-hunting lovers."

There was silence again for a while. Mary was considering deeply. Patricia, with her hands still folded, waited patiently for her verdict. Mrs. Moffat was surreptitiously sleeping.

At last Mary spoke.

"No, Pat. It cannot be done—at least, not with mother's and my sanction. The whole world would talk. You would compromise yourself with every young man in Europe. You are too attractive to travel alone. You must take up some philanthropic work in England as a safety-valve. I am sorry. I don't wish to appear unsympathetic. But you cannot go."

Patricia listened to her quite politely to the end. Then she rose and drew herself to her full slim height. "I must go now and interview Snag" (Snag was the head man on the place); "but please understand that in spite of what you say, I *am* going away. I am going alone; I'm going unchaperoned. I'm going as an impecunious young female, and—I'm going soon."

"Why, then, if you have made up your mind so definitely, so absolutely, so irrevocably, consult us at all in the matter? Why seek our advice, ask for an opinion to which you have no intention of listening?" inquired Mary. "Surely, it is a farce?"

Patricia paused with her hand on the door.

"I don't quite know," she replied, with a smile. "Because I suppose I have got into a way of consulting you and Aunt John about every conceivable thing in life. It has become a habit. I feel more satisfied and comfortable when you agree with me. I want you to agree with me in this, to sympathise with me—in fact, to beg me to go."

"We shall never do that," said Mary, with intense conviction. "Shall we, mother?"

"Never," returned Aunt John, waking up. "I would as soon think of giving an infant a box of matches to play with, or myself crossing the Atlantic in a canoe."

Patricia laughed as she closed the door behind her.

CHAPTER II

PATRICIA ROUTS THE ENEMY

BUT she tired them out. They began to dread the very sound of her footstep. There was no peace in the, up to now, pleasant house. No rest.

It would weary the reader to recapitulate all their arguments of the following days, to cover the ground of their line of attack and defence, to mention the number of times Mrs. Moffat and Mary referred to Patricia's age and attractiveness and general ignorance of the ways of the world. Their veiled hints as to the men who were prowling about the face of Europe ready to devour the first luckless young female who crossed their path. Of the number of diseases to be contracted on the Continent, from Roman fever to Riviera sore throat; of the earthquakes, mosquitoes, and other plagues she would be likely to encounter; of the insults she would receive from every person of every class, from the moment she set foot on any soil that was not British; of the number of times her pocket would be picked—and this to Patricia appeared the most feeble of all their arguments, for did they not know she never possessed a pocket; for what girl who considered her appearance and outline in these days of attenuated slimness did? Of the scandal and talk she would create in the neighbourhood. Why, Aunt John already felt faint at the

very thought of what Mrs. Wilmot of Shaw Hall, and the Misses Ponsonby of the Holt, and the Honourable Mrs. De Moleyns of the Manor House, and Lady Elwick of Elwick Coombe would say. Indeed, she shuddered. And Patricia was obliged to soothe her with little pats on the back and eau-de-Cologne held to her nose.

Then Aunt John sickened with influenza. She had been weakened, she said, by Patricia's "talk." The influenza microbe had been in the air ready to pounce upon those with a lowered vitality, and it had pounced. For a few days Patricia was quiet and very kind. She was a tender nurse; she was a beautiful reader aloud; as she moved softly about the room, Mrs. Moffat thought of ministering angels and other pleasant things. She whispered to Mary that perhaps dear Patricia was forgetting all about her mad, wild scheme. Her manner was saner, quieter, more normal. She was more like the happy, jolly Patricia of old. They hoped for the best.

But a day came when Mrs. Moffat was pronounced by the doctor as really convalescent. She had arrived at the stage when she revolted from "slops," and chicken jelly, and Valentine's meat extract. She only wept every four hours instead of every two; she wore her front beneath a pretty frilly cap; her soul yearned after Lady Ulrica whom she had left in the arms of a stalwart Russian prince.

That night Patricia renewed her attack. Mary sat one side of the bed, she sat the other; the invalid lay

back against her pillows, smiling placidly. At Patricia's first words Mrs. Moffat sat up hurriedly.

"You are not going to begin all over again?"

"Yes, I am." Patricia drew the pink shawl, which had slipped off, more closely around the invalid's shoulders. "Lie back," she said, "and try to keep calm."

In half an hour's time Aunt John folded her hands and said her temperature had risen.

"I don't think so," said Patricia; "you don't look in the least feverish, but I will take it to make quite sure."

She inserted the clinical thermometer beneath Mrs. Moffat's tongue, and tried not to laugh at the expression on the invalid's face.

"Ninety-eight point four. I thought so; quite normal. Keep your arms under the clothes, and let me arrange your pillows more comfortably." She avoided the pleading look in Mrs. Moffat's eyes and again renewed the attack.

An hour later Mrs. Moffat said that if her temperature were not up, it ought to be with her feelings. That she was convinced it was one hundred and four; she'd every symptom of it, and would like some champagne in order to prevent instant dissolution.

Patricia feared stimulants were only given when the temperature was sub-normal, and would Aunt John like a piece of ice to suck.

Mrs. Moffat shook her head and then burst into tears. Reproachfully Mary looked at her cousin.

"I can't help it," said Patricia, with her handkerchief catching some of Aunt John's tears as they rolled down her cheeks. "I don't want to be cruel, but this must be gone through to the end. I will ring for some oysters and hock, or would you prefer a basin of bread and milk, dear?"

The invalid closed her eyes tightly and shuddered visibly at the very thought of the last article of diet; so the oysters and hock were ordered, and a quarter of an hour later she was actually laughing.

Once again Patricia attacked; she had begun to discover the weak points in the enemies' defences. At first she had used diplomacy, skill, unexpected feints, sudden little rushes, but Mary had always been too quick for her. Now she realised it must be a case of sheer wearing them down, brutally wearing them out, harrying them, bullying them, till they threw up their arms in the last stage of exhaustion.

This stage arrived at eleven o'clock that night. Aunt John lay with closed eyes, but Patricia was relieved to see her colour was good. Mary was certainly a little paler than usual; but, then, she was often pale without any apparent cause. To make quite sure that all was well, Patricia again took Mrs. Moffat's temperature and felt her pulse. The former was normal, the latter steady.

"I will make some tea," she said cheerfully. "We all love tea late at night when we shouldn't, but it doesn't keep any of us awake; we are too sensible for that. How I shall miss you both when I am away!

But it won't be for many months, and it *is* nice of you to say you will look after the place for me."

She beamed on them both as she busied herself with kettle and stove, and dropped lumps of sugar and poured cream into cups.

She kissed them with extra warmth when she bade them good-night.

"To-morrow," she said, "we will discuss where I'm to go, as I shall want your advice. I know Mary loves maps and 'Baedekers' and routes and railway guides. Good-night, darlings. I'm so glad you've become sympathetic in the end. I knew you would. You're both so broad-minded."

They were too weakened to give her anything but a responsive smile, and when she had gone their jaws dropped feebly.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH MARY SCORES OFF PATRICIA

“**A**ND you really are in earnest? You genuinely wish to go abroad ‘on the cheap’? Travel in second-class carriages, stay at second-class hotels, eat cheap food and practise all the necessary little economies consistent with a small income?” Mary demanded.

Patricia nodded.

“It won’t be nice,” said Mary thoughtfully. “It’s not a bit pleasant or amusing haggling with proprietors about the price of rooms. It’s no fun sleeping in boxes facing due north, tipping waiters with five-franc pieces when ‘half a louis, miss, if you please,’ is written over every inch of their German-made bodies and clothes. It’s not a scrap exciting appropriating milk in readiness for your afternoon tea from the allowance made for your morning coffee, for you are conscious, as you are filling the little bottle you have sneaked down in your pocket, that the head-waiter’s eyes are bulging in your direction like over-ripe gooseberries, and your hand shakes, your head grows hot, and your feet will hardly bear you from the *salle-à-manger*, so paralysed have you become at encountering that gooseberry gaze. Neither is it the least exhilarating doing your ‘bits’ of washing in your room—your last laundry bill having reduced you to a state bordering on collapse, because

the moment you have your stockings suspended from your umbrella placed like a parallel bar between two chairs, and they are waving merrily in the breeze from the open window, your *femme-de-chambre* appears, the *femme-de-chambre* with the high thin nose, and lofty bearing and manner which indicate that she knows that, when at home, you go out charing in a black rusty bonnet and bugle-trimmed mantle, and are just indulging in the one holiday of your life——”

“I think it all sounds delightful,” interrupted Patricia; “so novel and interesting, and it must be such a satisfaction to know how cleverly you are managing and to keep within your income.”

“H’m!”

“I have always noticed that poor people seem much happier than rich—much jollier, get much more out of life.”

“Have you?” responded Mary drily.

She drew two chairs up to a table as she spoke and produced two pencils and some paper.

They were in the library. Outside the rain was now coming down steadily; an enshrouding mist hung like a pall over the distant low-lying hills; the lawns looked sodden, the shrubbery beds depressed and dank, the trees in the drive gaunt and unhappy. Inside, a bright fire glowed on the hearth; the room was warm with soft, rich colouring. Aunt John, in a comfortable arm-chair, was dozing peacefully before the fire.

“Now to business,” said Mary. “If you really mean you wish me to be your banker and make you a monthly

allowance of what *I* consider to be an adequate sum for your expenses while you are away, I am willing to go into it now with you."

"Thank you," said Patricia; "but couldn't we sit in the other arm-chairs before the fire?"

"No." Mary's voice was stern. "You must begin to learn to be uncomfortable. Poor people are rarely really comfortable."

"I see," said Patricia meekly.

Mary sharpened a pencil to a fine point. Then she made notes and lengthy sums and calculations on a sheet of paper. Presently she laid her pencil down and said: "I think seventy-five francs a week will be an ample and liberal allowance."

"Yes?" said Patricia cheerfully. "But do it in English money. I'm not very well up in foreign francs and things."

"It would be exactly three pounds a week."

"Oh!" said Patricia, gazing into the fire.

There was silence in the room for a short space of time.

"You mean, of course, just for my board at the *pension* or hotel, or wherever I go?"

"I mean for *everything*, exclusive of railway fares from one place to another and tips. For board, laundry, expeditions, sight-seeing, teas, as these are never included; sundries such as soap, matches, etc., stamps, books from libraries, and the thousand and one things necessary to one's comfort and happiness when away in a foreign land."

"It could not be done."

"It *is* done, and can be done again."

Patricia shook her head.

"*I* did it. I knew you did not realise what you were undertaking when you said you wished to travel as I had travelled. It is so easy to overcome obstacles when you are seated in a comfortable saddlebag chair. It is so easy to talk."

This roused Patricia. "If *you* did it, *I* can."

"That does not necessarily follow. Still, I admire your spirit. Shall we say four pounds a week?"

"We will say nothing of the kind. Let us proceed. Kindly tell me what I ought to pay for my room out of this lib—allowance."

"Not more than eight francs a day, at inclusive *pension* terms. This sum will command a small top north bedroom without a view. Or, failing there being any rooms facing north in your hotel, you will get one with the next worst aspect, which is east. Possibly a blank wall and a few slates, chimney-pots and cats will be thrown in gratis. This works out at fifty-six francs a week, leaving you a balance of nineteen for everything else."

Patricia looked bleakly through the window. Sur-reptitiously Mary smiled behind her hand.

"But do people really——?"

"Yes," interrupted Mary. "I have already told you. Hundreds of women with very small means elect to live on the Continent beneath blue skies and amidst

a laughter-loving people in preference to eking out an existence beneath drab skies in England."

"But—nineteen francs. Why, it—it would be cheese-paring."

"Exactly." Mary's tone was dry. "Poverty means cheese-paring. Some persons pare their cheese more cleverly and more elegantly than others, and the lookers-on are hardly aware of the process; whilst others pare theirs from the housetops." She gathered up the pencils and paper. "I see there is no use going on with our calculations. But—I imagined, somehow, you were in earnest; that you really wanted to live as the impecunious live; that you really wanted to see the other side of life—the middle side—not middle-class necessarily, but middle side. I divide people up into three classes: Those who do as they like so far as money is concerned—*i.e.*, the rich; those who make an effort to do as they like—*i.e.*, the not rich; those who do as other people like—*i.e.*, the poor. I believed you wished to study the life of the middle division, for the sake of—let me see, how did you put it?—for the sake of the development of your character. That you desired to live as the members of its community live. That——"

"And so I do," cried Patricia a little wildly. "And don't talk so much. You are giving me a headache, Mary. Now let us decide where I shall go."

"One minute. I would like to finish the business part first, and I propose to put it on a thoroughly sound basis. I suggest that you should inform your solicitor, Mr. Warmesley, that you are leaving England

for some months. Instruct him to pay all money and dividends direct into your bank, and get either the bank or me to forward you the allowance we have settled upon: monthly, if you feel you have sufficient self-control not to spend it all at once; or weekly, if you think you haven't. I should also suggest your leaving your cheque-book behind. A cheque-book is a temptation to those who are weak—— I mean, to those who have been accustomed to spending money freely"—Mary had met Patricia's eye. "The allowance I suggest should be forwarded to you in good, honest Bank-of-England notes, which Cook or any hotel manager will be glad to cash for you."

"Very well." Patricia was unaware she spoke dreamily, and Mary bit the top of her pencil hard. She had also much ado to keep herself from kissing her cousin, she looked so pretty and pathetic, and at the same time so brave.

"You are very like Oliver Cromwell," said Patricia suddenly.

"Why?" Mary was rather taken aback.

"Oh, I don't know. You just are; I've often wondered who it was."

"Indeed."

"You know the picture of him on the landing. The one which has a wart on his nose?"

"I haven't noticed the resemblance."

"It's not so much the features as the expression. What I should call a battle-of-Worcester-air," said Patricia dreamily.

"It is necessary with some people," said Mary inflexibly. "Oliver Cromwell, you will recollect, had to deal with a weak and vacillating monarch."

"But I'm not like Charles the First, surely! Mary dear, say I'm not; I'm getting so depressed."

"He had his lovable qualities."

"I know; but he *was* weak."

"Yes," agreed Mary.

There was silence for a time. Mary drew pictures of cottages in cabalistic signs, with smoke rising spirally from chimneys resembling top hats. Patricia drew pigs with curly tails and eyes like currants in a bun.

"You have forgotten," said Patricia, at length, a little nervously, "that I shall probably be ill abroad."

"Why? Your health is always excellent."

"Yes; but at eight francs a day the rations must be limited. Starvation——"

"The food will be excellent. The south room people will probably be paying from ten to twenty francs a day. They will help to support you."

"Then," said Patricia, abandoning doctors and chemists at one fell blow, "you have forgotten my clothes; I shall want a veil occasionally, a pair of gloves, a belt, shoes——"

"You will take everything with you. No sensible woman shops abroad unless she wishes to be rooked on every side."

"But, hats, gowns. One cannot foretell the fashions months ahead. How can you wear a hat six months old?" There was a tremor in Patricia's voice.

"The easiest thing in the world. I've often done it. Women who are poor cannot be really fashionable. Yet they needn't be exactly dowdy. They must strike a neutral note, something half-way between C in alt and G in the bass. Then they escape notice."

"But I don't want to escape notice—I mean——" Patricia stopped. She looked into Mary's eyes, which could be so softly brown and beautiful and sympathetic; but which were now so very Oliver Cromwellian. Then she gave in; she became quiet. She ceased to argue, ceased to skirmish. Three pounds a week was the sum Mary had arranged she, Patricia, should spend during her sojourn abroad. Three pounds a week it must be. But she took comfort to her heart in the recollection of the fact that *she* had come off victorious in the first battle. Mary was victor in the second; but one still remained to be fought. Instinctively Patricia knew that her aunt and cousin had settled from the beginning the place of her destination, the very hotel—indeed, the very room she should occupy. And if this place did not meet with her desire and approval, she told herself firmly, nothing would induce her to go to it. Resolutely she gathered herself together, armed herself *cap-à-pie*, so to speak, as Mary opened a Cook's map of Southern Europe and a Baedeker, and set her teeth.

"Italy, at this time of the year, will be cold," began Mary conversationally. "April is about the earliest month when one can expect to find comfort there. The Italians are not in the habit of heating their houses."

"I had been contemplating the French Riviera," said Patricia.

"Of course it's not original; it's hackneyed, it's almost commonplace," objected Mary reflectively.

"Still, the sun shines there, I suppose."

"It does in Switzerland too, brilliantly. At these winter-sports places one gets positively sunburnt."

"I don't know that I am specially desirous of being sunburnt. It's not becoming—at least, not winter sunburn. I saw some people last year who had been wintering at Mürren; they all looked very plain—healthy, certainly; but their skins resembled dusty oak-apple balls."

"There are more men—Englishmen—to be found in Switzerland than on the Riviera. They go to skate and ski and toboggan. Englishmen on their holidays must have the opportunity afforded them of breaking their necks if they feel so inclined. The Riviera is too safe. If you are in search of——" Mary paused. Patricia's direct gaze made her desire to put the position more delicately. "If you would like to make the acquaintance of a few men who are unaware that—that you are a prize in the marriage market, I should suggest Switzerland."

Patricia smiled quite good-humouredly. "Men or no men, I am going to the Riviera. I like what you told me of the Riviera. Mentone——"

"Oh, not Mentone." Mary put up her hand and spoke hurriedly, almost alarmedly. "You mean Nice."

"No, I don't; I mean Mentone."

Mary shook her head and closed her eyes as though in pain at sound of the word. "It would never do for you."

"Why not?"

"Oh, it's not your sort of a place. Not large enough. Nothing but the mountains all round, and the sea, and few people, comparatively speaking, after Nice and Cannes, and only a small Casino where you can stake as low a sum as a franc. The people at Mentone chiefly go expeditions up into the mountains on donkeys and mules, but that wouldn't do for you. Of course, *I* liked it. It's a darling place; but for you, it's different."

"But why?" Patricia inquired again. "Why shouldn't I like Mentone and find it a darling place, if you did?"

"It wouldn't be fashionable enough, smart enough, for you. I *have* seen women there obviously wearing last season's hats." Mary spoke reminiscently.

Patricia eyed her indignantly, but before she could speak Mary continued in a dreamy sort of way: "Nice is the place for you. Quite a large, fashionable town, and lots of wealthy people strolling about, and all wearing gloves."

"If my object in visiting a place were merely to gaze at gloves, I might as well remain in England and go to Worcester and ask to be taken over one of the factories——"

But Mary ignored her cousin's irony. Indeed, she hardly seemed to hear her, and went on talking about

Nice till Patricia felt inclined to scream: "So bright, so clean, so many amusements, such lovely shops! Oh, Patricia, the shops! Hats at three hundred francs—just poems. Frocks that could not have been built by human hands, but just emanated from—from the land of dreams—airy nothings, lovely gossamer confections like creamy meringues. Parasols resembling full-blown flowers. Oh, it's impossible to describe to you the creations to be seen at Nice."

"Don't worry!" Patricia almost shouted when she could get in a word edgeways. "I have not the slightest intention of going there. It sounds a horrid, rich, vulgar place. I'm going to Mentone."

"But why have you so set your heart upon Mentone?"

"Because I have. I like what you have always said about it, and now you suddenly throw it over for this common Nice. Why, last winter you came back giving me to understand that Nice was a dull—from our point of view—ugly, vulgar hole! I imagined it to be a place a cross between Brighton and Margate, given over to prowling Germans, over-dressed Frenchwomen, and men with high heels, flowing beards and pointed toes. And now you represent it as being the most delectable spot on God's earth."

"I don't say that, but I *do* say that as a place it might have been specially designed for you——"

Patricia got up from her chair suddenly, and she got up with such force that it toppled backwards, its legs having caught in the thick pile of the Turkey carpet.

"You may talk for ever," she cried, "but I insist upon going to Mentone, and I absolutely refuse, once and for all, to go——" She did not finish her sentence, for, having raised her voice, Aunt John suddenly woke up and, adopting the air of never having been to sleep at all, smiled pleasantly upon the girls and said:

"Well, Mary, have you persuaded Patricia to go to Mentone? Mentone, we think, will be such a nice and suitable place for you, because we know all about it and we know the hotel. . . . What's the matter, Patricia dear? Are you ill?" For Patricia was making queer noises in her throat while she gazed at Mary. And though, at first, she was unable to speak, she continued to gaze till Mary had the shame to blush and lower her eyelids.

Then Patricia laughed. She really couldn't help it. She had been so fooled, so tricked into making her decision.

"Some day I will be even with you," she said briefly. "I admit you are clever, much cleverer than I. But some day you will be sorry you were born."

"Whatever's the matter?" cried Mrs. Moffat, bewildered, as she looked from one girl to the other.

"Nothing; nothing very much. Only, at the moment, Mary and I are not the best of friends. That's all."

"I am sorry," said Mary meekly, "very sorry. But mother and I are feeling so very worried about you. We wanted you to go to the 'Bella Vista' at Mentone while you were feeling your feet. You are so inexperienced. It is such a nice quiet hotel, and only nice re-

fined people go there, chiefly women and old retired generals and admirals, and safe people of that description."

"You talk as though I were an infant—feeling my feet——! But perhaps you will allow me to see the letter you have already received from the 'Bella Vista.' I conclude everything is fixed up?"

"Yes," said Mary, falling into the trap. "I wrote at once, and I received this this morning." She handed her cousin a letter.

"DEAR MADAME," it ran,

"I shall be happy to reserve Miss Hastings the small north room on the top floor you occupied last winter at the terms you mention—eight francs a day *en pension*. My prices, owing to the dearness of food, have gone up this season; but as you specially mention that Miss Hastings is not in a position to pay more, I am willing to make a reduction in her favour if she will keep it strictly private.

"Kindly let me know the date on which I may expect Miss Hastings and the train by which she will arrive, when the omnibus will be sent to meet her.

"I remain,

"Yours obediently,

"PAUL PÉPÉ,

"pp. J. Cranberry."

Patricia laughed as she folded up the letter and returned it to Mary. "You appear to have forgotten to

make arrangements for my feeding-bottle and soothing-syrup."

Mary did not speak.

"And my pram and bath."

Still Mary did not speak.

"And the washing of my bibs and long robes." Patricia sat down close to her and stared fixedly into her face.

"I am sorry," Mary breathed at length. "Won't you forgive me, Patricia darling? We have your interests so much at heart, and you are so—dangerously pretty and attractive——"

"And now you try to get round me with blarney and soft soap. Mary, it is unworthy of you. It's unlike you."

"Oh dear!" suddenly moaned Aunt John. "I *do* so dislike people who talk in riddles, and I feel so dull and depressed and shaky, and it's my first day down. And all you two do is to talk like parables in the Bible. And—I should like a footstool."

Conscience-stricken, Patricia found the most comfortable footstool in the room, while Mary shook up Mrs. Moffat's cushions.

"Thank you," said the invalid graciously. "That is better."

"Do you think you ought to remain up any longer?" inquired Mary. "You know the doctor said you were not to leave your room till to-morrow."

"It was only for something to say and to look professional," observed Mrs. Moffat placidly. "Doctors

must do something for their money. He has never really understood my case. He could not detect that my eyeballs were aching, though perhaps it would be difficult, now I come to think of it, and *I* had to suggest the oysters; and once he left the thermometer in my mouth for nearly ten minutes while he talked to Patricia, and it's so difficult to breathe with a glass tube under your tongue, I nearly suffocated. Has Mary told you the best train for Mentone, Patricia?"

"Not yet. But I expect she'll tell me everything presently when her arrangements are quite complete. Won't you, Mary?"

"I am sure she will," said Aunt John warmly. "Dear Mary is so practical."

CHAPTER IV

MARY PRESENTS PATRICIA WITH A BLACK MOIRETTE PETTICOAT, AN INDIA-RUBBER BATH AND SOME USEFUL ADVICE

ON the following day Patricia began her preparations. First of all, she took Nannie, once her nurse, now her maid, to her bedroom and told her of her impending departure.

"Yes," said Nannie, "and when do we start, Miss Patricia?"

Patricia explained that she—Nannie—was to be left behind.

"Why?" inquired Nannie briefly.

"Well, I've decided to go alone. There are reasons . . . I—well, this trip abroad will be quite different from an ordinary visit to friends. It will be quite different from any other trip I've ever taken, Nannie."

"Yes," she agreed, "I'm sure it will, as I'm not to be there. Who is going with you, Miss Patricia?"

"Nobody."

In her excitement Nannie sat down in the arm-chair Patricia was herself about to take, and her young mistress remained standing.

"What are you going for, if I may make so bold as to ask, Miss Patricia?" Nannie was twisting the corners of her apron into radishes and her eyes were full of tears. She was not so young as she had been.

Patricia knelt down at her side and took the hard hand that had rendered her so many services during the twenty-five years she had been with her. She smoothed it affectionately while she tried to find words to explain the position of things.

"Nannie, I will tell you why I am going away alone, but nobody else must know. None of the other servants, Snag, or any of the villagers. You understand. Well, first of all, I want an adventure. I want a change of scene and people, and—I want it alone. Do you know, I have never been a day alone since I was born."

Nannie remained less impressed with this information than Patricia thought she would be.

"Then, I want to learn to do things for myself, not to be so dependent on others."

"You've always done your own hair, Miss Patricia." This had been a constant grievance with Nannie. But when Nannie "did" hair, as Patricia confided to Mary, she "did" it as though it were to remain in that position for ever and ever. She used the hairpins in the manner one uses skewers to keep a round of beef in shape, and the result, though it might with impunity weather the wildest storm or be dragged through the most prickly gooseberry-bush in an unscathed condition, was not artistic.

"Yes," said Patricia gently, "I know; but I want to learn to do other things as well. I'm very helpless, and some day I might be stranded on a desert island. Some day I might have to learn to be capable all of a sudden, and then where should I be?"

"You'd be nowhere, Miss Patricia," said Nannie. "At least," she added, trying to soften her words, "you'd not be very far. You're quick, and I've known others as shaped worse at a job."

Patricia thanked her for her encouragement and went on: "Then I want to see how other people live and manage, the people who haven't so much money as I, the people who travel second-class and eat sandwiches in trains."

"And are *you* going to eat sandwiches in trains?"

Patricia nodded. "Y-es."

"From a paper bag?"

"I suppose so. I hadn't thought about it."

"If you're going to do the thing properly, you must do as the poor people do. It's no use your just going and watching them, and then passing along the corridor to the restaurant-car and having a good lunch." Nannie had often lunched on a train, so knew all about it. "It's doing things that's the trouble and gives you experience. It's not just watching other people. I can go and watch Mrs. Caddick wash and iron a heap of clothes. I don't get a bit tired doing that. I can lean against the mangle with my hands on my hips and watch the perspiration trickling down her face, while my own feels quite nice and as cool as ice-cream. But if I began to wash those clothes myself, I should know something about them before I'd finished with them——"

"I'm going to wash my own stockings," Patricia broke in; "Miss Mary says I must——"

Nannie's mouth opened and shut like a fish's. "And are you going to wear them afterwards?"

"Of course. Otherwise what would be the sense of washing them?"

"What else are you going to do, Miss Patricia?"

"I don't know till I get abroad. All sorts of things will probably then turn up."

Suddenly Nannie, without a word of warning, burst into tears. Patricia gazed at her in consternation. Here was another weeping person on her hands. She felt relieved to think that nobody remained to be taken into her confidence; there was nobody else to sob and require comforting.

She soothed her old servant to the best of her ability, patting her hand and whispering kind words in her ear. But it was a long time before Nannie could be induced to take a cheerful view of her mistress's prospective "voyage of discovery."

"There are earthquakes nearly every day, I'm told, in those foreign parts, and cholera and plague and missionaries being roasted alive or eaten up in cold blood," she said dismally.

"But not where I am going."

Nannie shook her head prophetically.

"You never know once you leave England what will happen to you, Miss Patricia. A friend of my brother's was killed by a lion, and my uncle's cousin was drowned in the China Sea by a typhoon, or something like that, and my aunt's great-uncle was bitten by a snake, and his sufferings were terrible to witness. England is the only

safe place to live in, especially for ladies. What with volcanoes and earthquakes and wild animals and savages and plague and famine and thieves and murderers in those foreign parts, you'll never know one moment's peace or happiness till you get back again, Miss Patricia, if ever you *do* get back."

It was with difficulty Patricia strangled a laugh at the awful and lurid picture presented to her. But she knew that her old nurse was in deadly earnest and believed what she said. So patiently she described the life she expected to lead on the French Riviera. She spoke of its happy, light-hearted people, its sunshine and flowers and gaieties. Its peasants washing clothes in the running streams, or tending the vines on the hill-sides.

"Such a simple, hard-working, happy people!" she finished enthusiastically. "Very poor, I'm told, but happy, because of the blessed sunshine, Nannie."

And then if Nannie didn't go and wonder that any of them escaped sunstroke, and advised Patricia never to be without a sunshade, much less a hat, as was her custom in England when the day was fine.

Finally, seeing that Nannie's pessimism was not to be overcome all in a minute, and that the idea of her mistress's facing the world alone and unprotected must be allowed to sink into her mind slowly, Patricia tried to create a diversion by suggesting that her travelling trunks should be brought to her bedroom, and Nannie should assist her in sorting her "things," and help-

ing her to a decision as to how much of her wardrobe should be taken and how much left behind.

Soon they were deeply engrossed in this absorbing problem. Frocks, blouses, dressing-jackets, delicate lingerie, ribbons, belts, gloves, veils, hats, were piled upon the bed, sofa, ottomans, chairs and every available article of furniture in the room; and it was at the juncture when, there being no chair left to sit upon, Patricia had just squatted herself upon the floor, while Nannie still continued to empty drawers and wardrobes, that Mary knocked at the door and walked in.

Mary had been absent all day. She had announced that sudden important business had called her to town, and she had gone up by the nine-forty-five express.

Now she staggered beneath the weight of many heavy parcels and looked tired but bright—the bright sort of look, Patricia said later, that the Excelsior youth must have worn when he'd planted his banner.

"Oho!" she said, "a bazaar in prospect? Thank you, Nannie, I am glad of a chair. What are you doing?"

"Preparing to pack."

"Preparing to pack?"

"Preparing to pack," repeated Patricia firmly. One glance at Mary's face, and she saw there was fresh trouble ahead.

"But why pack all this miscellaneous collection of things? They will only spoil in your absence and would have been quite safe in your drawers and wardrobes."

"They are going with me."

"Going with you?"

"Yes," said Patricia irritably. "Don't I speak plainly?"

"So, after all, you are going as the rich Miss Hastings?"—Mary's face wore an expression of tolerance, not one of surprise, but of just patient tolerance, as much as to say: "I'm not in the least astonished. I expected this. You're a poor, weak thing"—"And my journey to town has all been wasted, been in vain. But never mind."

With an heroic effort after self-control Patricia inquired what her journey to town had to do with the question of her—Patricia's—packing.

"I've been to shop—to shop for you. A few useful articles of dress, and one or two little things I found of the greatest comfort and help when I was abroad, and which no impecunious female should be without."

"I should like to see them."

"But——"

"If you think I am contemplating taking too much," said Patricia, glancing at the array of finery on the bed, "I am quite willing to thin it down, to weed some of it out if you think necessary. I am quite willing to take your advice if it be reasonable."

Mary was surprised at this sudden docility. She was unaware that Patricia herself had made the discovery all in a moment that her trunks would not hold a third part of what lay before her. For Mary the previous evening had happened to mention casually that

the room she had occupied at the "Bella Vista" would only accommodate one trunk, which must be small, a hat-box and a hold-all under the bed, and that was a squeeze and led to frequent barking of shins against the furniture; and was not this same room to be Patricia's?

"Of course, I *could* keep a trunk on the landing," said Patricia, voicing her thought.

"It would be rooked by the servants, and why wish to travel about with such an enormous amount of luggage? You will have a great deal to pay on it, and you will require so little in the way of clothes. A couple of coats and skirts, one plain evening gown, one dressy sort of day-gown, two or three blouses, and a couple or three hats at the most. One trunk would take all these quite nicely."

"And what about silk petticoats and underclothing and—and boots and shoes and everything else?" asked Patricia.

"I was coming to the petticoats. Indeed, that is what I chiefly went to town about. No woman that I've ever met abroad travelling inexpensively, travelling second-class, is without a black moirette petticoat. Nannie, you might open this parcel. That's it, thank you."

From its brown-paper covering Mary drew a petticoat of black moirette and held it up at arm's-length for Patricia's inspection.

"Isn't it a beauty?" she said, stroking it in a caressing manner. "Just the thing to travel in—in fact, to wear during the spring, when one often gets a chilly

day. You see, it is of silk moirette, is warm, yet light, serviceable, ladylike, and—has a pocket. I waited for an hour while the pocket was made and stitched into position in the front breadth. In this pocket you will keep your purse. All women who travel, especially single women, wear moirette petticoats with pockets. They may, at times, obstruct the traffic while they lean forward and search for these pockets. I have seen a woman hold up six passengers desirous of entering a railway carriage whilst she made frantic efforts to find her purse in order to tip a porter. She was a large woman and completely blocked the doorway. They may, in raising their upper skirts, inadvertently raise their petticoats as well, moirette being of a curiously clinging nature, and expose, well—I needn't go into particulars, nice people look the other way. They may at times be unsuccessful in finding the pocket at all. I have known a woman miss a boat at Como; but that is a long story, and she was nearly drowned in trying to vault over the side after the gangway had been raised. Still, in spite of the few disadvantages attached to pockets in petticoats, they are more than balanced by the enormous advantages. Nobody ever picks the pocket of a black moirette petticoat. Not even the most daring of thieves——”

“You needn't say any more,” interrupted Patricia, from her position on the floor. “I am grateful to you for your trouble, but I shouldn't dream of wearing that petticoat, not if you talked from now till Doomsday. Remove it, Nannie, please. I am tired of looking at it.”

Mary rose. "I am disappointed in you, Patricia. I am not blaming you, because it's been your bringing-up, but I'm disappointed. I genuinely thought you were in earnest when you stated that you wished to practise being poor. I thought you meant to start on this journey in a serious, practical and self-denying spirit, just as men start off to find the North Pole. But I see you are only going to play at it; that you are inconsistent, like the rest of your sex; that you mean to wear all your silly, frilly, fascinating silk petticoats and all your elaborate gowns and hats, and travel by *coupé lits*, and have your pocket picked every time you step out of your hotel door."

"There must be something between *coupé lits* and *moirette* petticoats," said Patricia, trying to keep her temper.

"No, there isn't." Mary was gathering up the rest of the parcels, one of which fascinated Patricia, being of a strange shape, unwieldy, large, yet obviously not heavy from the way in which Mary handled it. Patricia felt she would like to see it and said so.

"No," said Mary. "You will only carp at it."

"I won't."

"Promise."

Patricia nodded.

Mary sat down again, cut the string of the parcel, and, as an arrow from a bow, an india-rubber bath shot from the paper to the floor, causing Patricia and Nannie to positively jump with surprise, whilst it settled itself in heaving, uncanny, jellifying movements.

Patricia gazed at it with unconcealed disgust.

"That is your bath," said Mary. "That is the bath you will use daily abroad." She looked at it admiringly.

"Will it quiver and move about like that when it is filled?"

"Try it," said Mary.

Together Nannie and Patricia emptied a couple of jugs of water into it, and it ceased to be so active.

"Now empty it. No, not you, Nannie. Let Miss Patricia. She wants to learn to do things for herself."

Defiantly Patricia seized it. Mary should see. . . . The next minute she was soaked from head to foot.

"I refuse to take that thing away with me!" she shouted when she had got her breath. "It—it's uncanny."

"No, it isn't." Mary was consumed with laughter. "It's a normal india-rubber bath, but they always do that if you try to empty them alone—shoot water all over you like an elephant does with its trunk when it gets annoyed and a pond is handy. Never try to empty one by yourself, it's an impossible feat."

"But haven't they got baths on the Continent?"

"Certainly. Only the usual charge is two francs a day for one. Two francs a day means fourteen francs a week."

"But I can afford it——" began Patricia. Mary silenced her with a look. Patricia, feeling rather unhappy, got out of her wet frock into a dressing-gown and changed her shoes for bedroom slippers. A knock

came at the door, followed by Aunt John's voice asking if she might come in.

"I am dull and lonely by myself. I came to see what you were doing," she said. "You seem to be having such fun."

"We are having no fun whatever," said Patricia, clearing an arm-chair and pushing it up to the fire; "at least, I am not. That"—following the direction of her Aunt's gaze—"is an india-rubber bath, and this is a black moirette petticoat. Mary wishes me to wear them on my travels."

"Wear a bath!" ejaculated Mrs. Moffat in amazement.

"Well, wear one of them. It is immaterial which. They are both equally impossible. If I were to invest myself in the india-rubber thing, fold it round me, make holes for my arms and legs and put on a pair of motor goggles, people would only think I was a lady driver."

"Dear me!" said Aunt John, folding her hands.

"Have you finished?" inquired Mary. "Because there are several other things left for you to ridicule."

"She is not ridiculing them, are you, Patricia dear? It is only her sense of humour," said Mrs. Moffat. "And why are you in your dressing-gown and bath slippers?"

Patricia explained, at which Aunt John laughed immoderately.

"I knew you were having some fun," she explained, "and I missed it."

"There may be some more," said Patricia, "though your ideas and mine of amusement differ."

"This," said Mary, "is a chamois leather bag. No," she added, anticipating her mother, "it is not the one that contained my christening cup. It is larger, as you will see. I bought it specially for Patricia. In it you place ten pounds in gold, stitch it up and fasten it inside your corsets."

"What for?" Patricia was genuinely interested.

"Really, you do ask foolish questions," said Mary.

"You stitch it there for safety," explained Aunt John, "so that you can't have it stolen. Most thoughtful of Mary."

"But that has already been provided for in the shape of what Mary calls my 'under' pocket. Is the whole of Europe, bar the British Isles, infested with robbers?"

"Very nearly," said Aunt John. "Besides, the 'under' pocket is for your current money, the chamois leather bag is for the rest," she concluded vaguely. "Now go on, Mary."

But Patricia refused to go on. "No," she said, clasping her hands round her knees for support and strength, "I want to thrash this out. What do you mean by current money and the rest?"

"Current money, of course," said Mary in the tone she adopted towards girls in shops who inquired of her if pink sarcenet ribbon would do instead of blue satin, "is the money you use on your journey for current expenses. You just take enough with you and no more."

The other, which is safely stitched inside your clothing, is for emergencies. The train might break down or be snowed up, or encounter floods or catch fire, and then an English sovereign, you will find, will serve as an open sesame to much comfort and happiness."

"And how do you get at the bag? Do you ask a stranger to produce a pair of scissors and unpick it for you? For I don't see how you could possibly do it yourself unless you took off your clothes in the train—indeed, practically undressed," observed Patricia.

But Mary was becoming tired of the subject and passed on to "A Stitch in Time," which was a pretty article shaped like a miniature Eiffel Tower and made of wood. It unscrewed at one end, and tucked away into the apex of the tower was an ivory thimble; below this, where the tower widened, were two reels of cotton, one black and one white; and below this, in the base, were neat packets of needles, tape, linen buttons, pins, hooks and eyes and darning wool. Unfortunately, when the tower was opened everything fell out, and Patricia and Nannie were on their hands and knees some time finding them, while Mary was expatiating on the extreme usefulness of the thing. While Patricia, with a parasol, was raking out the thimble from beneath the chest of drawers, and Nannie was behind the dressing-table searching for the reel of black cotton, Mary mentioned how invaluable she had found hers when she had been abroad; that everything was so handy and always there. That her own had been purchased at Tremezzo on the Italian Lakes and was made of cedar-wood; and al-

though she had searched London from one end to the other she had been unable to procure a cedar one for Patricia; and did Patricia mind? As, if she did, and taking into consideration that she was going away and they might never meet again, she would give her hers.

Almost with tears in her eyes Patricia begged her not to think of such a thing, that she simply could not hear of such an act of generosity; that "A Stitch in Time," even if made of common wood, would more than fulfil her every requirement. And Aunt John, being still weak, wept a little in sympathy.

"And now we come to something not utilitarian, but pretty—really pretty." Mary took up a soft, interesting-looking parcel, and Nannie's face brightened. She was never happier than when decking her young mistress out in the plumage of a bird of paradise (if Patricia, who really dressed well, would permit it). She liked nice, bright colours and plenty of tucks and gathers and frills. She came nearer to Mary at the magic word "blouses," and her spirits rose. Never understanding Patricia, she had imagined her to be really depressed at the other purchases. She did not like her mistress to be depressed. She was never easy in her mind when Mary and Patricia were sparring at one another, even though they might be smiling at the same time. She knew that a deep affection existed between the cousins. Still. . . . Miss Mary did say such things at times in that grave way of hers! Why, if she said a quarter as much to cook, cook would not only tell her to mind her own business, but might even threaten her

with the basting-spoon, her temper was *that* short on occasions. And Miss Patricia bore it all like an angel!

"Shall I undo the string, miss?"

"No, thank you, Nannie. I cannot forego the pleasure of myself exhibiting these blouses to Miss Patricia. There!" Mary shook forth from folds of tissue paper two white pongee silk blouses, conceivably costing about five and elevenpence each. They had the usual Valenciennes yokes of the cheapest quality of lace and the usual excruciatingly badly-made neck-bands, low, practically boneless, and obviously designed to fit a person liable to apoplectic seizures, being about twenty inches in diameter.

"You will see one is high and the other semi-evening. They are for you to wear in the evening with your black silk skirt, and are quite fashionably made. Most spinsters abroad with limited incomes wear nice pongee blouses for dinner with a black voile skirt with three flounces, and a waist-band pointed at the back of ruched silk. Your black skirt will be much too smart, too well-cut for the position you will be taking, but it seemed a pity to buy another. Now this is a string bag——"

"One moment, please." Patricia handed the blouses to Nannie. "Now continue."

"You refuse to wear them?" inquired Mary, raising her eyebrows.

"Certainly. You know my pet abomination is a blouse that isn't of the same colour and texture as the skirt. You know that I never have worn a ready-made pongee blouse with a black skirt in my life, and I'm not

going to begin. To discuss the matter further would be a waste of time."

"What are you going to wear in the evening?"

"I—I don't know. I haven't given any consideration to the subject. It—it is so immaterial"—Patricia was getting slightly flurried. She might be in a witness-box, she felt, and Mary counsel for the prosecution. "The black silk bodice, perhaps, belonging to the skirt."

Mary snorted. It was a snort so full of scorn that Aunt John felt impelled to try to soften it. Dear Patricia was leaving them so soon that one should try to give in to her a little. The bodice was so simple——

"That's just it," cried Mary, "it's the simplicity of it that makes it so dangerous, so alluring. It is the most attractive bodice in Patricia's wardrobe, and she knows it. She will wear it at night, with probably the only unattached bachelor in Mentone sitting at the next table. He is sure to be there. Somehow Patricia will have 'drawn' him to her hotel. Somehow she will have manœuvred that he should occupy the next table. Somehow——"

"I don't think you should talk like this before Nan-nie," said Aunt John in an audible and agitated whisper. "It's not quite kind, Mary."

Both Mary and Patricia laughed, and Patricia blew her aunt a kiss.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," she said. "If Mary will let me off the blouses, I'll wear the moirette petticoat. There!"

Mary wavered, and while she was wavering Patricia slipped out of the dressing-gown and into the petticoat, and at sight of it Mary abandoned the blouses without another word. As Patricia said, it was a facsimile of the petticoats she was in the habit of presenting to the old women of the parish at Christmas. It drew up at the waist with tapes into a large, impressive bunch at the back, hard, stiff, and unyielding. Whilst the front rose in voluminous folds swathing the hips.

"I look like Betty Shone in it." Patricia was revolving slowly in front of the mirror. Betty Shone turned the scales at sixteen stone eleven pounds.

"Yes," agreed Mary, with a happy expression. "It is a nice useful garment, don't you think so, Nannie?"

But Nannie was too unhappy and worried to reply. Furtively she peeped at the array of silk underskirts lying on the bed. She had so loved to hear the faint rustle of her dear young mistress as she walked about the house, and now—— Miss Mary likened her to Betty Shone. Things were all topsy-turvy.

"I think you said this was a string bag." Patricia resumed her dressing-gown, and again sat down on the hearthrug, clasping her knees with her hands.

Mary said that she was quite correct in her supposition, and, at the same time, would like to add that in her opinion never had a more useful article been invented. She said that she always felt a string bag was like a dog: the friend of man. And that when you had no use for it you could roll it up flat and sit on it.

"But you can't do that with a dog," interposed Patricia. "It would bite you if you did."

"A string bag on a journey is invaluable. I have tested it. It holds your package of sandwiches, your Baedeker, sponge-bag, towel, soap, slippers for the night journey, eau-de-Cologne, magazines, 'stitch in time'——"

"Does that go on the journey?" inquired Patricia in an awed voice. She pictured herself on hands and knees on the floor of the carriage searching for the things that had fallen from the Eiffel Tower.

"Of course," said Mary, "all second-class spinsters carry them. You never know when your stocking or glove might require a stitch."

"But you can't take your stockings off before a carriage full of people."

"It is wonderful what you *can* do with management. Some travellers are very obliging," Mary assured her.

"Remove the string bag, Nannie," said Patricia briefly.

"But——"

"It is not a bit of use your arguing. That string bag does not accompany me to Mentone. You are perfectly well aware that I dislike a string bag more than anything else in the world. I dislike it more than moles on the face or a man with a beard. Whenever I have met a string bag on the road dangling from some person's hand I've felt inclined to sob, haven't I, Nannie? There is only one more depressing thing in the world

than an empty, depressed, starved-looking string bag hanging down in all its hideous netted entirety, and that is a full one—a fat, bulging, vulgar full one.” So worked up did Patricia become in her condemnation of the article in question that when she placed it on the fire Mary said not a word. Only Aunt John made a desperate and futile effort to capture it from the flames with the tongs, and nearly fell into the fire herself.

There was silence for a time. Mary sat with closed eyes, and Patricia sat with compressed lips, whilst Mrs. Moffat and Nannie sighed at intervals. The gong for tea sounded through the house.

“I must have my tea-gown, Nannie,” said Patricia. “I am tired.”

“We are all tired,” said Mary. “I am wondering how many of us will be alive by the time you are ready to start.”

CHAPTER V

WHICH INTRODUCES MR. DAVID WROXHAM

ON the morning of Patricia's departure for the Continent another household less than fifty miles away was convulsed (though in a much milder degree) at the departure of the head of the establishment—also for the Continent.

"That is my address, Smithers, and—my name: Mr. David Wroxham. You've got it all right?"

"Yes, sir."

Following out a recognised precedent in novels, Smithers should have spoken without a flicker of emotion in his voice. He should be presented to the reader as grave, deferential, imperturbable, with a mask-like countenance and well-controlled manners, a perfect servant, a walking automaton, bloodless as the head of a cauliflower, suave, and with the tact of a well-drilled monarch.

But truth must out, and when it is stated that his "Yes, sir," was a series of arpeggios ending on a crescendo note, it will be recognised that as a servant Smithers was not up to the usual standard, inasmuch as he was human.

"You like the name?"

"Yes, sir, it sounds well; but I like your own better."

"Why, Smithers?"

"Well, sir, it's more familiar to me."

Mr. David Wroxham smiled as he rose from his bountiful breakfast-table, and strolling to the window, lit a cigarette.

"You see, sir, I'm conservative by nature, if you'll excuse my mentioning it, seeing we are not of the same political opinions, and when I get used to a thing I like to stick to it. I know that every time I address a letter to you as Mr. David Wroxham I shall feel strange and unsettled. I shall also feel that I might be addressing them, if you'll again excuse my mentioning it, to a criminal who has escaped the law."

Mr. Wroxham laughed outright.

"I'm sorry, Smithers, and I hope that a somewhat vivid imagination won't carry you away sufficiently to cause you to believe that I am one."

"No, sir, I don't think so. Of course—" Smithers cleared his throat deferentially—"you have your own reasons for wishing to travel incog., same as Royalty when it goes abroad for a cure to reduce its weight."

"I have." The reply was curt, and Mr. Wroxham, with a slight frown between his eyebrows, looked through the window on to the Thames, which, owing to heavy rain and an unusually high tide, was running rapidly and turgidly beneath the bridges. Mr. Wroxham was very attached to his view, even on a grey day such as this. Indeed, it was on the strength of it that he lived in such expensive chambers.

"Can I fasten your bag, sir, now?" Smithers handed his master an ash-tray. Mr. Wroxham had a painful

habit of dreamily and unconsciously flicking the ends of his cigarettes on to the carpet.

"Yes, everything is ready. Strap the easel, as usual, to the gladstone, and I shall want a taxi at ten-thirty."

"Won't that be a bit late, sir, for the eleven o'clock? There's the weighing of the luggage."

"Yes, I forgot that; ten-fifteen. And, Smithers——"

"Sir."

"You'll be good to Richy Dick?"

"Of course, sir. He is always my first care when you are away."

Wroxham rose, and lifting his arms, opened the door of a cage which hung in the window, and with gentle hand took out a small, bright-eyed canary, and for a moment held it to his face.

"Poor little Richy Dick. Will you miss your old master?"

Richy Dick intimated that he should, and familiarly hopping on to Wroxham's shoulder, gently pecked at his white collar.

"You won't forget a bone sometimes, and a bit of apple, Smithers."

"No, sir. I'll get Newtowns; he likes those best."

"Oh, does he? And he's no bad judge, are you, old chap?"

Richy Dick, as his master sat down again, hopped on to his knee and suggested with well-known coquetish movements that his small yellow head should be tickled.

"And, Smithers——"

"Sir?"

"The other birds——"

"I won't forget them either, sir. Crumbs every morning and evening on the window-sill, though spring *will* be coming."

"Doesn't look like it. Ugh! What a morning! I shall be glad to leave this execrable climate for the sunny South."

Half an hour later Mr. David Wroxham stepped into a taxi-cab, followed by Smithers, and drove to Victoria.

The astute reader, pleased at his own perspicacity, and quite naturally too, will have said long ere this: "And of course he meets Patricia." And of course he did; otherwise, attached as I am to Mr. David Wroxham, he would not have appeared in this story. He would have remained in London painting pictures, enjoying his view of the Thames, lunching with his *confrères*, shuffling out of dinner-parties and talking silly nonsense to Richy Dick.

He entered Victoria Station at precisely the same moment as Patricia, though they did not encounter each other till later. Each was busy with the weighing of luggage, buying of papers, forcing a way through busy throngs of people, and murmuring last inanities to those who were seeing them off.

"You've got your Cook's ticket safely in your bag and the receipt for your registered luggage? Eighteen shillings is a cruel amount for excess. I got through for twelve and twopence last time. It's those eleven

costumes; I knew what it would be," Mary sighed deeply.

"I wish you would not speak of them as costumes," protested Patricia a little wearily; "three of them are only simple little linens, as you know."

"Simple little linens!" Mary snapped her jaws together. "What you needed was one dark-blue serviceable gingham and a spirit iron to smooth it out from time to time. Don't lose your keys; and have you your thermos?"

Mary was getting Patricia off in masterly fashion. Porters had turned at her command, officials had been subservient, guards had bowed down before her small, firm person. As Patricia said later, Mary had received more politeness in the space of half an hour than she—Patricia—received during the whole of her Continental travel.

Patricia held on to her skirts like an orphan child. At first she had felt somewhat nervous and forlorn without the customary capable footman and maid to see her through the fray; she felt convinced she would miss the train; convinced there would be no room for her in any carriage—they had been a little late in arriving. But gradually Mary's calm and masterly handling of difficult situations impressed her. An extra train was being run—Patricia felt, entirely due to Mary's management.

"You will find there is a seat reserved for you; don't get fussy. Ah, here it is!" Mary signified to the porter that he might place Patricia's hold-all and fur coat on the rack and her attaché-case on the seat, in spite of

the baleful eye of a stout lady already seated, who unmistakably suggested that she would like to reserve the entire carriage for her own person and impedimenta.

"But it is first-class," protested Patricia.

Then Mary informed her that after some deliberation she and Mrs. Moffat had agreed that as this would be her first long journey taken alone and without any one to look after her and make the rough places smooth, a first-class ticket might be conceded.

"But I don't want any concessions," said Patricia stoutly. "It's not fair——"

"Get in," said Mary curtly. "There are no seconds on the Rapide. Of course, if you wish to remain behind——"

Patricia got in, and the stout lady condescended to remove an immense roll of rugs and umbrellas a fraction of an inch nearer to her own portly person.

"I'm not very stout," said Patricia politely, "but still——"

"There is nowhere else for them to go," said the lady in pugilistic tones.

"On the rack, of course," said Mary. "This young lady has paid for a seat—— Thank you."

If looks could have killed, Mary would have fallen dead upon the platform; but as it was, she continued serenely: "The sea, I expect, will be a bit choppy. I should lie down immediately you get on board. I know it sounds valiant and British to remain on deck in a cold wind, with the sea heaving round you; but in ten minutes' time you'd probably be heav—I mean you

would exhibit marked symptoms of sea-sickness and find it expedient to go below. Now I wonder if there is anything else? I hope nothing has been forgotten."

"There ought not to be," said Patricia. "You've worked hard."

"Yes," said Mary, "we've got you packed and labelled and safely in the train at last. Do you—do you feel like a second-class spinster, Patricia dear?"

"I think so."

Her words belied her. Mary's conscience, as she looked up at the laughing face framed in the window, pricked her. Should they have given in to her? Should they have been talked over—browbeaten?"

"Are you wearing your *moirette* petticoat?" inquired Aunt John.

"Yes, can't you see I look like a balloon?" Patricia's voice, which she unconsciously raised, carried through the open window of the next carriage, which was a smoking compartment, and in which Mr. David Wroxham had just taken his reserved seat and was about to open his morning paper.

The freshness of the voice, the laughter in it, the strangeness of the words, filled him with a sudden desire to see who, resembling anything so ungraceful as a balloon and with such a voice, was occupying the next carriage. He was not a specially curious man—indeed, he was too lazy by nature to be curious, but the remark had arrested his attention. There were still four minutes before the train started; another paper would help to while away the tediousness of the journey; the

bookstall was but a stone's throw away. Smithers had just been dismissed, Mr. Wroxham disliking drawn-out last words. Leisurely he descended from his carriage—leisureliness is an Englishman's attitude when his interest has been aroused, and he scarcely glanced at Patricia as he passed. But he saw enough to cause him to hasten his steps on the return journey. The face was uncommon, his quick artist's eye rapidly telegraphed to his brain; it was clever, and yet wholly and delightfully feminine. He stared a little longer as he again passed her carriage to his own, and then almost stopped; for to his consternation he perceived her to be crying. Mary and Aunt John had just murmured to her some last little tender words of parting, and, as Patricia had often been heard to remark, whenever people she loved said nice things to her she always felt inclined to howl.

"Yes," she cried, leaning from the carriage window and mopping at her tears, "I'll remember everything, dears: airing of clothes on the chauffage, putting on an extra wrap at sundown, applying thermogene to my chest at first symptom of a cold——" And it is doubtful how many more intimate and domestic details relating to the welfare of Miss Patricia Hastings might not have been carried to Mr. David Wroxham's straining ears, had not a busy uniformed person come along with "Take your seat, sir, please. Stand back there!" accompanied by a banging and slamming of doors and shrieking of engines as the train slowly began to move out of the station.

"Good-bye, darlings, good-bye," said Patricia, waving her handkerchief.

"Good-bye, dear heart," they cried. And then Mary played her last card. Running along the side of the train, she suddenly flung a bulky package into the carriage, which Patricia deftly fielded. "It's only a little refreshment—some fruit if you get thirsty. I was nearly forgetting it," she shouted.

"Thanks, awfully," yelled Patricia. "You *are* a dear!" The last glimpse she caught of Mary was of a person consumed with laughter, and somewhat aggrieved, she sat down with the package held tightly to her breast with one hand, while with the other she brushed away her tears. "I weep and Mary laughs," she said to herself. "She might have waited till I was out of sight. But perhaps she was trying to cheer me up—dear, kind old Mary!" She fell into thought, and the portly lady regarded her with curiosity.

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After a while she remembered to open the package. Her face was soft. She had been thinking very tender things of her aunt and cousin. Almost reverently she removed the paper and string as one touches the things which have belonged to a loved and dead friend, and—a black string bag full of oranges lay before her! and five pairs of eyes belonging to her fellow-passengers were staring at it with extreme interest.

The oranges were not even wrapped in silver or tissue paper. Each round yellow ball shone through the open

meshes of the bag. Once Patricia had seen such bags being borne to Hampstead Heath on a bank holiday. She knew that she looked and felt like a woman who keeps a tripe and chipped-potato shop.

Mr. Wroxham, from his corner seat, still feeling slightly perturbed at thought of the weeping girl in the next carriage, suddenly saw a black object fly past the window, and, involuntarily starting from his seat, witnessed this same black object disgorge a stream of oranges on to the line. At the same time he caught a glimpse of an extended arm and a laughing face leaning out of the next carriage window. The next moment they had vanished.

"Dear me!" murmured Mr. Wroxham to himself; "dear me!"

He subsequently found some difficulty in keeping his attention fixed on the leader of his paper. Germany might be going too far. She often did. But still. . . . The girl in the next carriage must be of a somewhat unusual type. First, she had proclaimed she was like a balloon—a most untrue statement. Next, she had wept openly and unashamedly, apparently quite unconcerned as to her looks. Five minutes later she was seen to be in convulsions of laughter, flinging oranges from the train on to the line, surely a most unusual proceeding! What would she do next? Mr. Wroxham felt quite anxious to know. And when he recollected that the same boat would bear them across the Channel—for it was hardly likely she would remain at Dover—well, he felt pleased at the prospect.

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH IT IS OUR PAINFUL DUTY TO RECORD THE FACT
THAT OUR HEROINE SUFFERS FROM SEA-SICKNESS

BUT as far as that was concerned Mr. David Wroxham might have been travelling on a North German Lloyd and Miss Patricia Hastings on a P. and O. for as much as they saw of one another. She disappeared the moment her feet touched the deck, disappeared below to the ladies' saloon, and Mr. Wroxham felt distinctly aggrieved. The sea was not particularly choppy, the wind not unduly cold, and an English girl of the build of Patricia, dressed, Mr. Wroxham had perceived, as she walked from the train to the boat, in a neat blue serge suit which was eminently nautical, and with such a lithe, free, easy walk straight from the hips, should have been able to withstand the elements and remain on deck.

Mr. Wroxham turned up the collar of his coat, thrust his hands into his pockets and stared at the white-crested waves with moody eyes.

Meanwhile Patricia, much as she had hurried, found that every seat and every berth in the saloon was already occupied with a recumbent figure, and a stewardess was doling out black American cloth-covered bolsters to agitated ladies who, seizing them at once, lay down on the floor.

Patricia thereat snapped up a bolster for herself and, lying down, placed her feet upon her hold-all, according to Mary's directions that they should be higher than her head if she wished to escape sea-sickness, and her head against the hard black bolster. Then, covering herself with her fur-lined coat, she closed her eyes and tried to repeat some lines from "The Blessed Damozel." But somehow they did not seem appropriate to her surroundings. The sea was beginning to heave in unpleasant fashion; skittish waves raced up and flung themselves against the stern of the boat; Patricia found herself beginning to wait for them. Presently a sensation of sick inertia began to steal over her. She had been reading of late some works on Christian Science to please Mrs. Moffat, who, objecting like the rest of the human race to paying doctor's bills, had made the remarkable discovery that mind over matter was not only efficacious in minor ailments, but inexpensive. She had wished for Patricia's opinion on the subject, and when Patricia gave it quite frankly, Mrs. Moffat remarked that she had apparently been unable to get a proper grip of it and that it required an open mind.

Patricia now wished most fervently that she not only had an open mind, but one that was stronger than her matter. Perhaps if she strained every effort. . . . She abandoned "The Blessed Damozel" and whispered to herself: "I don't feel a bit queer or uncomfortable. In fact, I feel as though I were in a daisy-spangled meadow, listening to the song of larks." (Of course she

realised that this was a lie, but she persevered.) "The scent of the grass, hot in the sun, is delicious. On the breeze, hawthorn petals are carried hither and thither like fairy snowflakes. The meadow——" She paused. The meadow suddenly began to be unlike the stable, reliable meadows to which she was accustomed, but to jump about in horrid undulating movements. It was the most unpleasant meadow she had ever come across. But she made another valiant effort; perhaps if she brought superhuman will-power to bear upon its skittishness she might succeed in reducing it to a state of orderly sobriety. "The meadow——" But at this juncture a lady lying with her head at Patricia's feet asked her if she could draw up her legs a little, as she was cramped for space.

"If I move I shall die," said Patricia dramatically.

"Of course, I don't want you to do that," grumbled the lady, "but——"

"The meadow——" continued Patricia, in a crooning whisper.

"But still I think you are occupying more than your fair share of space." She shook Patricia's hold-all to emphasise her words, and Patricia moved, opened her eyes and sat up violently. Fortunately a stewardess was close at hand.

"I told you," she said reproachfully to the lady when she felt a little better.

"But you're not dead. In fact, you're looking a better colour already, and you'll be all right in a minute or two," said the lady optimistically.

"Shall I?" snapped Patricia.

She again laid her head on the black bolster, closed her eyes and returned to the daisy-spangled meadow. Presently she felt sleepy, almost comfortable, and when the boat began to slow down and she realised they were nearing Calais, she wished that ancient town was a hundred miles away.

There was a noise about her of persons scrambling to their feet, of collecting of baggage, of calling to porters; but she made no effort to move. There was no hurry; her seat on the Paris express was reserved, and Mary had said the late arrivals at the Customs had the best of it. If you went into the *douane* with the struggling mass, you were either jabbed in the eye or the back by porters dangling bags and bundles on straps from every part of their persons.

She decided she would be a late-comer.

But a stewardess decided otherwise.

"We're there, miss," she said cheerfully.

Patricia resented her cheerfulness. Was every person on board a rosy aggressive optimist? She did not move.

The stewardess bent down and gave her a vigorous shake. "Are you asleep, miss?"

"Yes," said Patricia; "and don't wake me up for five more minutes, and then I shall feel quite rested."

"You can't rest here, miss. It's against the rules. I'm sorry."

"How inconsiderate of the company to make such rules," said Patricia, struggling to her feet, "and just

as I was becoming attached to my bolster too. Will you be so kind as to call me a porter to convey this hold-all to the train? Thank you."

It was a very white, woebegone Patricia that David Wroxham saw passing through the *douane* a few minutes later, and an extraordinary desire to help her and to carry her heavy coat wellnigh overcame his British reserve and reluctance to addressing a perfect stranger. He was disappointed in her, he had to admit; disappointed that she had proved herself so poor a sailor. Still, she looked so dejected with her pretty, tumbled hair framing her white face . . .

He lingered at the exit of the *douane*, he himself having got through some minutes before, and wondered where she was going. Paris, for certain, at first; but afterwards. . . . She was coming now. She did not see him, being far too engrossed in keeping her rapid porter in view. As she passed, Mr. Wroxham caught sight of a label on the small attaché-case she was carrying, and one word heavily underlined stood out distinctly from the others—"Mentone."

For the second time that day Mr. Wroxham felt aggrieved. She was going to Mentone; but he might have known it. It was just the sort of place a girl would be going to whose destination wasn't Cannes or Nice, which would have been worse. A semi-fashionable town within easy reach of Monte Carlo, a town possessing a casino and a band in the public gardens, and people strutting up and down like over-fed peacocks. He was disappointed in her; he had conceived her to be

original, and—she was going to Mentone. Figuratively speaking he washed his hands of her.

But in less than a couple of minutes' time his interest, in spite of himself, was again aroused. He was making his way in leisurely fashion to his carriage after purchasing a couple of French comic papers, when he caught sight of the amazing spectacle of Patricia, with her arms crammed with boots and shoes, tearing along the platform and gesticulating wildly to the stolid back of her porter to stop. Her hold-all, which was slung on a strap from his shoulder, had burst and from its gaping side trickled a thin stream of boots and shoes and books.

Patricia had predicted to Mary that this would happen. Mary had said that all Patricia's heavy articles must be packed in the hold-all, which would then go in her carriage as free unregistered luggage, otherwise she would have a considerable sum to pay in excess on her trunk. Mary added she had always managed this way herself and had been successful in running her luggage through for next to nothing. And when Patricia said she had no special desire to do this, Mary had given her one of her looks and remarked that she had been under the impression that Patricia had expressed a wish to travel as she had travelled, and to help her in the matter she would stitch black tapes to the sides of the lining of the hold-all to keep the articles within secure. She had then shown her how to economise space by tucking a bottle into each boot and shoe. Patricia's hair lotion reposed in a bronze slipper, and

some Elliman's embrocation, upon which Aunt John had insisted, was placed in a stout walking boot.

And now the tapes had burst, and not only was Patricia's foot-gear streaming on to the platform, but bottles lay about in fragments.

"*Arrêtez! Arrêtez!*" screamed Patricia, and the porter in front, in no way connecting this command with himself, stumped stolidly along, anxious to discharge the young lady and her abnormally heavy hold-all into the Paris express with as much expedition as possible.

At last, her arms being full to overflowing, and at sight of several passengers already seated in the train smirking behind their hands, she completely lost her temper and to her "*Arrêtez!*" added "*Cochon!*" It was a distressing thing to have said, a vulgar, a most unladylike; but it had the effect of bringing the porter to pause, just as Mr. Wroxham, hurrying from behind, came to the rescue.

"May I be of any assistance?" he inquired, courteously raising his hat, and at the same time picking up one of Patricia's best patent boots.

"Thank you," she replied, and at sound of her voice Aunt John and Mary would have rapidly disappeared, had they had the misfortune to be present, for she was in dangerous mood. Two bright spots of anger burnt on her cheek, and her eyes flashed fire. And had there been one flicker of amusement in Mr. Wroxham's eyes, the slightest trace of laughter in his voice, he would

never again have addressed Patricia and this story possibly not have been written.

"Thank you; you may. Will you be good enough to tell this porter that he is a stone-deaf, stupid idiot—my knowledge of French is limited, and that I am sorry for a State that sees fit to employ such a dolt. And while you are making this clear to him I can repack my hold-all."

For an instant David Wroxham turned his back on Patricia and his lips twitched. Then, master of himself and graver than an alderman on the bench, he ventured respectfully to hope that he might assist her with the hold-all, as time was passing. . . . Together side by side they knelt on the platform, stuffing in the boots and shoes, and then Mr. Wroxham readjusted the straps lengthwise instead of across, and producing a piece of string from his pockets, tied up the hold-all in the middle, giving it the appearance of a pinched waist; and all the time Patricia gave him the impression that she regarded him as the sole instrument of the disaster that had overtaken her, and Mr. Wroxham was strangely meek.

"Have you a seat reserved?—we have only a couple of minutes; perhaps I could find you your carriage?"

"Yes, Hastings is my name," she said briefly. They hurried along the platform in silence, the porter, with every feeling outraged at the epithet she had flung at him, following breathlessly and vowing vengeance upon the whole of the race which called itself British, and Mr. Wroxham's porter, who had been patiently waiting

with a heavy bag in either hand, brought up the rear.

"Here is your carriage." Mr. Wroxham was still very meek. "Don't mention it. I'm glad to have been of use." He disappeared in search of his own smoking compartment, and it was not till they had been under way for some ten minutes that Patricia remembered he had tipped the porter for her! She had seen him do it too, watched him with wide-open eyes, witnessed a franc pass from his hands to the man's, and she had uttered no word of protest. So great had been her anger, so busy was she vowing vengeance against Mary, so shamed and ridiculous and small did she feel in the eyes of the world, that, her mentality being temporarily obsessed by passion, she had actually allowed this stranger to hand money for her to a French porter without so much as a single word of protest.

Again her cheeks flamed. What must he think of her? Shame swept her from head to foot. First he had picked up her patent boots; then he had packed and secured her leaking hold-all; then he had found her her seat; then he had tipped her porter; and—she had not so much as said "Thank you!"

For a moment she covered her face with her hands, trying to shut out the vision of her own ill-bred self. Because she had been annoyed, because she had been made ridiculous in the eyes of a lot of strangers whom she would probably never see again, she had behaved in a common, stupid and atrocious fashion. What must he think of her? She would never see him again,

never be able to repay the franc, never be able to thank him. . . . But—— Suddenly she sat up and removed her hands. What an idiot she was! he was on this very train. Always impulsive, Patricia sprang to her feet. The next moment she was hurrying along the corridor of the rocking train, a franc clasped tightly in her hand.

CHAPTER VII

MR. DAVID WROXHAM WANTONLY DESTROYS A RAILWAY
TICKET AND PURCHASES ANOTHER

SHE took some minutes to find him, for she searched every carriage she passed with painstaking diligence, just as though she feared he might be concealed beneath one of the seats. She stumbled across him at length, standing in the corridor and gazing reflectively at the passing scenery.

"Excuse me," she said, "but I owe you this franc. I let you give it to my porter without realising what you were doing. I was so—so angry. It has just come to me."

He took it from her gravely.

"And I want to thank you for your kindness. You must have thought me very ungrateful and rude."

"No," he said, "I didn't."

"But I was very rude," she persisted; "it was strange that you didn't think so." She looked into his face almost challengingly.

"Perhaps——" he returned her look with one of amusement, which he instantly suppressed, noting that she slightly flushed. "You see," he spoke apologetically now, "I saw that you were distressed and I was worried."

"That is a kind way of putting it," said Patricia. "I was, in reality, in a towering temper." She might have been imparting to him a piece of information which he could not by any conceivable chance have been able to discover for himself, and again he experienced difficulty in keeping his features under control. "You see," she went on, "I predicted that this would happen, that my hold-all would give way."

"Oh!" he was gravely attentive.

"But my cousin—a cousin who is used to travelling—was so emphatic that none of my heavy things should go into my trunk."

"The trunk being insufficiently strong?" he asked, with an interest which the subject under discussion scarcely warranted.

"No, it was not that." Patricia did not pause to consider that, once having repaired her omission and thanked this man for his assistance, she should, after bestowing upon him a stiff and maidenly bow, have returned to her seat. She forgot all about Aunt John and Mary's warning to be circumspect, stand-off and icily reserved towards any person not attired in the garb of a female. She was so genuinely glad to pour out the troubles of her hold-all to somebody. "You see, if your trunk is very heavy, the amount charged for excess luggage works out to quite a considerable sum."

"But haven't you had to pay on the hold-all?" Now, in putting this question, I regret to have to record that Mr. David Wroxham was guilty of grave deceit.

He knew perfectly well that she had not had to pay on the hold-all, that all hand baggage travelled free of charge; but he was so afraid she might suddenly take it into her head to go away and leave him, he was so extraordinarily anxious that she should remain standing where she was and talk to him a little longer, that he stooped to this deceit quite unblushingly, honourable though he was by nature.

"Oh, no! You are evidently not used to Continental travelling." Her air of patronage was delicious. "Hand baggage is always free."

"Oh, indeed!"

"You didn't pay on yours?"

"No; at least, I don't think so."

"But you ought to know. Haven't you your baggage receipt?"

"Yes, I suppose so, somewhere."

Patricia looked at him with curiosity. This man, though nice and helpful, was obviously unfit to travel alone.

"I should look to see if you have it safe if I were you."

"Perhaps it would be wise." His hand moved in the direction of his waistcoat pocket. "I believe I put it here."

Patricia watched with interest. If he had lost the receipt, it would, in spite of her hold-all fiasco, give her a distinct sense of superiority as a traveller; but to her disappointment, just as he was about to insert his fore-

finger and thumb in his pocket, he paused and became visibly embarrassed.

"I—I'm sure it's all right——". To her surprise he quite stammered. "I—I'm quite sure I put it there."

Now it must be explained that Mr. Wroxham's baggage receipt, which was as safely tucked away as Patricia's own, clearly and unmistakably indicated that this baggage had been registered to Taormina—the word was inscribed at the corner of the thin, white, crackly bit of paper as plain as a pikestaff; and all in one blinding flash, as Patricia stood before him looking up into his face with eager interest whilst the colour came and went in her pale cheeks, it was borne in upon him that he should not go to Taormina, but to Mentone. He knew it as surely as he knew his own name, and the suddenness of this discovery naturally took his breath away a little and caused him to stammer. But in spite of his momentary agitation he did not lose his head. Patricia must not be permitted to see that baggage receipt, her sharp eyes would inevitably detect the word Taormina, which would later on mean explanations, equivocations, possibly even lying, for no man, not even the most abstracted and dreamy of men, would register his luggage to Sicily and himself take the train to Mentone.

"Yes," he repeated. "I'm sure I have it safely."

She made a slight movement of impatience. "But still, it would be so easy to find out."

She now felt convinced he had lost the receipt and was not prepared to admit it; possibly his ticket too.

Obviously he was *not* to be trusted to travel alone. However, he made no attempt to search his pockets; instead, he asked if she intended breaking her journey at Paris, and this was a most unwise move on his part, and the moment the words were out of his mouth he regretted them; for, with a drawing-up of her slim body, Patricia made it quite clear that though willing to discuss with him abstract things, such as hold-alls and baggage receipts, she could not allow him to degenerate into personalities, and with a bow quite courteous, but unmistakably stiff, and a renewed expression of thanks for his assistance, she left him.

For fully half an hour Mr. Wroxham remained standing where he was, debating busily by what means he could prevent a trunk containing books, canvases, paints, brushes, palettes, and all the paraphernalia upon which an artist is dependent for his work, from travelling to Taormina.

And he had reached Paris without solving the problem.

"I want," said Mr. Wroxham, buttonholing a Cook's representative an hour later at the Gare-de-Lyon, "to change this ticket to Taormina for one to Mentone."

"Can't be done."

The man was in a hurry. Several agitated females were hanging on to his coat-tails, asking incoherent questions about their prospective journeys.

"Well, would it be possible to prevent a trunk which is registered to Taormina from going there?"

"No," said the man.

Mr. Wroxham sighed. He was a man of some means, but not of extravagant habits. It seemed a pity that a first-class ticket to Taormina should be wasted. Then, too, his inability to prevent his trunk from going there was regrettable. It meant a certain amount of letters to be written and much tiresome red-tape officialism to be overcome before his trunk could be recovered. He sighed again. He could plainly see that days of weary work lay before him. Yet strange to say, one idea never presented itself to him, that he could still continue his journey to Sicily and rescue his trunk himself, as was his original intention. There were times when he was not brilliant.

He had crossed Paris by taxi-cab to the Gare-de-Lyon, so had Patricia. She was now seated, he knew, in the station restaurant, having some dinner. He himself was dining at a restaurant some little distance removed from the station. For a reason difficult to explain, he did not wish Patricia to know that he was travelling to the Riviera by the night express. Perhaps he felt that she would detect his change of plans; perhaps he was fearful that if he were to meet her face to face on the platform or in the restaurant, her eyes, suddenly becoming endued with X-ray-like powers of research, would penetrate into his waistcoat-pocket and lay bare his guilty secret. Anyhow, he dined in a restaurant which was not too clean, nor the food too appetising. Afterwards returning to the station, he

carefully destroyed his Cook's ticket to Taormina, purchased one for Mentone, managed, by a piece of good luck, to secure a corner seat in a smoking compartment, and then hid in a waiting-room till the train was due to depart.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH PATRICIA CONSIDERABLY ANNOYS AN ELDERLY GENTLEMAN AND AGAIN ENCOUNTERS MR. DAVID WROXHAM

IT was precisely nine o'clock when Patricia took her seat in the night express for Marseilles, and she found her fellow-passengers to be an elderly couple of most unattractive appearance and quarrelsome disposition.

At eleven o'clock she made her preparations for the night. She wrapped herself in her fur coat, changed her shoes for a soft pair of quilted satin slippers, loosened her belt and collar-band, tied a piece of chiffon over her hair and lay down with her head against a hired franc pillow. She was tired, and looking across at the couple opposite, she wished they would cease quarrelling, shade the light and make preparations to sleep.

"*He* will lie with his head pointing east, and *she* west, and, as they are both short, they will manage very comfortably," and after thus satisfactorily disposing of their persons, she became drowsy and was soon fast asleep.

She was awakened by feeling something stirring at her side. Horribly startled, she put out her hand and discovered it was a boot—a hard leather boot. The

short elderly gentleman was certainly lying with his head pointing eastward, but—on her own side of the compartment. He was moving restlessly in his sleep; he was also snoring loudly and deeply with his head thrown back and his mouth wide open. Slightly raising her own head from the pillow, Patricia stared at him, horrified and speechless with indignation. Then with a sudden movement she shot him on to the floor.

She had not meant, perhaps, to be quite so violent—she never quite knew; but the fact remained, he *was* on the floor, flat on the india-rubber matting, too amazed for a moment to move.

Patricia peeped down at him through the semi-darkness.

"How did I get here?" he inquired. "Did I fall?" He addressed her as though she had been his guardian angel watching over him in his sleep.

"No," she replied, "I moved rather suddenly, and you—slipped."

Instantly he became suspicious. "You mean you kicked me off." He was struggling to get up and the noise woke his wife.

"Perhaps," said Patricia severely; "but you had no right to be there—I was amazed; I could scarcely believe it."

"You are thinner than my wife. We thought that would be the best arrangement."

"Oh, did you?" Patricia almost choked.

"Yes; you didn't engage the whole of that side of the carriage for yourself."

"No, perhaps not. But still——" Suddenly a desire to laugh overwhelmed her. The elderly gentleman was now on his feet; his thin, grizzled hair stood on end, and he was stroking the back of his head with considerable feeling. "I hope you are not hurt," she added politely.

"Yes, I am," he grumbled, "very much hurt. In fact, quite bruised. I believe I could bring an action for damages against you." He sat down by his wife, and she brushed the dust from his coat, and they both glared at Patricia.

"Well, I shouldn't, if I were you. I'm sure the jury would decide in my favour."

"I don't see why it should," he argued; "it's not your carriage, and—now you're laughing." From anger he descended to reproach.

"Well, I'm sorry!" Again she fought with her laughter. "As I say, I didn't really mean to hurt you, but I was so surprised and indignant."

"I don't see why you should be," he repeated. His wife, with a fat, much-bejewelled hand, was trying to make his wisps of hair lie down, which, standing up, gave him a singularly ferocious aspect. In their mutual annoyance with Patricia they had consented to make up their own differences.

"Anyway, please lie down," suggested Patricia. "I will sit with my head up in the corner and my feet on the hold-all."

"Not at all," he said, with such violence that he made Patricia quite jump. "I can't see why we shouldn't

both lie down; we were very comfortable before—it is ridiculous nonsense!”

Again Patricia became speechless with indignation.

“My wife and I are too—too stout to occupy the same side, and why we should all be uncomfortable because——”

“Say no more,” cried Patricia; “your suggestion is intolerable. I am going out in the corridor to get some fresh air—this carriage is insufferably hot, and—I may not return till the morning, so *please* make yourselves comfortable.” Where she proposed to spend the remainder of the night she did not stop to explain. As she bounced out of the carriage door she nearly fell into the arms of Mr. David Wroxham.

“I might have known she wouldn’t be asleep like an ordinary person,” he said to himself later on, “and would want to get up and see the sun rise. Though why she should expect the sun to rise at such an unearthly hour I cannot imagine; and why, admitting it was going to break the laws of Nature and get up before its time, she should expect to have it all to herself I cannot conceive. Has she cornered this particular portion of Europe for her exclusive use?” From which foregoing observations it may be safely deduced that Mr. Wroxham was feeling aggrieved.

Yes—Patricia had not behaved kindly to him. Indeed, she had been barely polite. Admitting that it *had* been disconcerting tumbling across him at two o’clock in the morning, when her hair was all dishevelled, and her collar-band unhooked, and her feet in flat,

heelless, unbecoming slippers, she should have yet remembered that this man had performed a kindly action for her earlier in the day; had knelt on cold flags on her behalf like a Mohammedan pilgrim, and tipped porters for her when her mind was wandering, and should not now have treated him like a tramp.

"Oh!" she had ejaculated, "is that you?" Afterwards, on reflection, she was struck with the commonplace character of this observation and nearly cried.

He admitted it *was* he.

"I never dreamt that you were going to the Riviera—I mean I never thought we should meet again—I—I—what I really mean is you had passed out of my mind and I—I'm so surprised that . . ." Each moment she floundered worse and became ruder, and with each word she uttered she succeeded in making Mr. Wroxham feel the more guilty for being there. "I—I came out to see the sun rise," she concluded.

"It is a little early for it," he suggested.

"But surely not in this part of Europe?"

"It is only three o'clock, and is but February after all."

"What time does it—er—rise?"

"I'm not quite sure, somewhere between five and six, I should say." He felt vexed that his knowledge of the diurnal movements of the sun was so limited. She seemed to expect that he should know all about them. "I got up to smoke." He did not know why he felt impelled to offer this explanation for his presence, but somehow her manner seemed to demand it.

"Oh!" she said coldly.

This observation annoyed Mr. Wroxham. After all, the train was not run for her special benefit, nor was the corridor for her exclusive use; he had as much right to it as she. Rather elaborately he began to refill his pipe. Then glancing at her sideways, he saw that she looked pale and tired, and almost childlike with her hair tumbling about her face beneath the chiffon scarf. It was a long journey for her to take alone; perhaps she had passed an uncomfortable night and her nerves were on edge; perhaps her fellow-passengers had been tiresome. He relented, and a strong desire came over him, as she stood there a little drooping in the dim light, to make things easier for her; he was always chivalrous towards women.

"I hope," he said, "you have been comfortable and been able to sleep."

"No," she returned; "I've been most uncomfortable. The carriage has been overheated and I've just kicked an old gentleman off the seat."

"Kicked an old gentleman off the seat?" Mr. Wroxham was full of a great amazement. "What—why did you do that?"

"He annoyed me. He—he was guilty of great rudeness. I—I cannot explain, but I was obliged to take strong measures. I hurt him a little, and he and his wife are very indignant. That was why I really came out to see the sun rise." Again she had frozen, again she made it unmistakably clear that Mr. Wroxham's

presence was inconvenient to her, if not actually distasteful.

For a moment he held his ground. He refused to be ordered about by this young person. He was here first. Then, stealing another glance at her, he saw her lip quiver ever so slightly.

"Can I do anything for you?" he asked gently.

She shook her head. "No, thank you. You are very kind. I have dealt with him myself, as I have told you."

"Oh, I did not mean that"—he suppressed a smile with an effort—"but in any other way."

"No," she said again, "there is nothing you can do. I—I shall just wait for the sun. I see there is a seat at the end of the corridor. Perhaps you will allow me to pass. Thank you."

A faint scent of violets seemed to come from her scarf or her hair as she touched his shoulder in passing; and a most insane desire came over Mr. Wroxham to seize her, and, at the same time, slap her as she brushed by him. Certainly she was the most provocative person. . . . He watched her for a moment as she sat down and drew her fur coat over her quaint little satin slippers and leaned her head against the panelling behind her; then he returned to his own compartment. An hour later, when he ventured to draw the curtains back from the windows of his compartment and stealthily peep through them, he found that Patricia had fallen fast asleep.

CHAPTER IX

ENTER MISS FELICITY RUGGLES, WHO SUCCESSFULLY
COPEs WITH PATRICIA'S BEDROOM

"WELL," said Patricia, in reply to a question which had just been put to her by the English manageress of the Hôtel Bella Vista as to where she would like her trunk to stand, "there seems," casting her eye round the nine-by-six-foot bedroom, "only one place for it, and that is on the bed just at the foot, and I could lie with my legs drawn up. I'm not subject to cramp."

The English manageress eyed Patricia with a look, frozen, direct and unwavering. The majority of people blink their eyelids at times. It was a peculiarity of the English manageress of the Hôtel Bella Vista that she never blinked. From the moment she got up in the morning till she went to bed at night her eyelids remained wide apart. Patricia sometimes wondered if a spark from the engine of a train, or a bit of coal-dust, or a fly, got into Miss Cranberry's eye, whether she would still remain unwinking.

Patricia moved a little restlessly beneath this disconcerting gaze. "Where do people's trunks usually stand?" She tried to speak cheerfully, and she tried to look brightly at the diminutive washhand-stand and wardrobe and mirror against the wall, and one chair.

"Some people put them in one place and some in another," said Miss Cranberry, waving her arm a little vaguely at nowhere in particular.

"And which are the places?" inquired Patricia definitely.

"Well, of course, no one who has occupied this room has ever had so much luggage." She now turned her unwavering gaze upon Patricia's large trunk. "I should suggest that that stood on the landing outside your door."

"Very well," agreed Patricia. "And—I see there is no *chauffage*. A north room is cold——"

"There is one outside in the passage just opposite to your door."

"Yes, but one *chauffage* in your room is surely worth two in the passage. I can't dress and undress out there. I took a room and not a passage." She now tried to speak playfully; but Miss Cranberry, who was anxious to return to her accounts below, was in no mood for badinage.

"This is the best room we can do at the price. It is the one Miss Moffat occupied; it has a lovely view of the mountains, and is quiet. If you prefer a south room at twelve francs——"

"But I don't," interrupted Patricia quickly; "I—I am quite satisfied—at least, I shall be very soon when I'm unpacked and can see daylight—that is to say, where my things are to go."

"Would you like some hot water and some tea?"

"If you please."

But as soon as Miss Cranberry had gone, Patricia remembered she couldn't afford tea at one franc fifty; that she must make her own if she wanted it, and she wanted it very badly. So she rang the bell, countermanded the order, and fished out her kettle and stove.

A couple of hours later she lay on the bed, wondering if she was going to enjoy being poor as much as she had anticipated. It had sounded so novel and interesting and pleasant. Up to now she had merely found it fatiguing. She lay and looked at the disorder of the room; a jumble sale might have been proceeding—hats, blouses, underlinen, packets of tea, biscuits, writing materials—all lay in confused heaps, some on the floor, where she had laid them as she unpacked. Her washstand caused her to close her eyes quickly; the sight of it made her feel physically sick. All her toilet accessories, her brushes and combs and bottles and button-hook and manicure set were muddled up with her sponges and soap and tooth-powder. There was no fireplace in the room, so there was no mantelshelf on which to lay a few of her things.

"Why, oh, why did not foreign countries run to dressing-tables? Why was one expected to keep one's silver-backed brushes on a cold, repellent, marble-topped washstand?"

She thought of her own charming dressing-table at home, with its white lace covers, on which her silver had always shone with such resplendent magnificence; of its winged bevelled mirrors; of its cunning jewel drawers, and with difficulty she suppressed a groan. It was six

o'clock. Miss Cranberry had informed her that dinner was at seven-fifteen, and the first gong sounded at seven. She had one hour and a quarter at her disposal in which to bring order out of chaos and dress herself. She turned over on her side. She felt unequal at present to doing anything but lie still, with her eyes tightly closed. She fell to thinking of Mr. Wroxham. She had thought of him a good deal during the last twelve hours. When he had left her seated in the corridor at three o'clock in the morning she had suddenly felt sorry that he had not remained. She was cold and tired and forlorn and hungry, and she began to wonder why she had been so curt and disagreeable to him. She was honest enough to know that it had not arisen purely from the maidenly reserve which Aunt John and Mary had so impressed upon her she must cultivate; she was friendly and frank by nature. She had never regarded man as a species which must be set apart in isolated grandeur and regarded with awful and fearful admiration. The accident of sex she looked upon—well—just as an accident; a pleasant one for man, an unfortunate one for woman. She knew, as she sat there huddled up trying to keep warm, with her eyes on the faint light, cold and wan, which was creeping almost imperceptibly into the sky, that she had been so curt with this man who had befriended her merely because her pride had been touched. He had seen her at a disadvantage on each occasion of their meeting, and in a ridiculous position, and she had resented being seen thus.

“What must he think of me?” she had asked herself,

as she tried to keep her head in position against the slippery hard wooden panelling.

If she had known what he was thinking of her at that particular moment, she would have been considerably surprised and more than a little angry.

"She is a conceited, uppish, superior young person," he had just decided. "Extremely attractive . . ." he allowed himself, with the appreciative enjoyment of an artist, to dwell for a moment upon each line of her charming unusual face—"but all marred by her want of manners. I refuse to give her another thought." And he straightway thought of her without a single break till he reached Marseilles.

"I believe he is a nice man," decided Patricia, "and I like his nice easy figure and well-cut clothes. And his voice . . ." Richy Dick, the canary, would have endorsed all that Patricia thought of his voice, which admittedly was one that "drew" people towards him in a remarkable way—men and women alike. "If he is at breakfast, I think I will be nice to him—that is, if he will allow me," she said to herself before she fell asleep.

He *was* at breakfast, and when Patricia, after a careful toilet, sailed into the restaurant-car and gave him a most friendly bow and smile, and took a seat at the next table to his, he was, at first, so knocked all of a heap, that he was scarcely able to reply to her pleasant good-morning, and afterwards could hardly remember a word of their, to him, too brief conversation. He knew that he had made some banal observation about

the rising of the sun, and that when Patricia pointed out that it never *had* risen, and the morning was dull and cheerless, he had become as confused as a schoolboy. Then they had talked about the coffee, and he had said idiotic dull things about the beetroot sugar, and gradually they had drifted into silence.

When he was again seated in his own compartment he had sworn freely beneath his breath for some minutes, somewhat to the surprise and distress of a mild-mannered, bespectacled gentleman of Scotch extraction. "I might be twenty years of age, a callow youth, and she treated me as such. Her patronage was odious."

But this was not true, and he knew that it was not. Patricia had been on her very best behaviour.

He had not met her at lunch on the train, as two had been served, owing to the large number of passengers. He had taken the first and she the second; and although he had debated for some twenty minutes at which she would be the more likely to be present, he was not altogether sorry to have missed her.

He hoped that he would meet her again somehow or somewhere. He hoped it very greatly. Was he not going to Mentone solely on her account? Mr. Wroxham had not, at present, envisaged the idea that he was about to fall in love with this girl; men are not so quick as women at analysing and dissecting their own feelings; he only knew that she interested him more than any woman he had met up to now. He hoped their acquaintance might ripen into friendship; but he did not

wish to force it, especially as she was alone. He was willing to wait. The thought that a day might come when they might know each other sufficiently well to be able to take expeditions together into the mountains stirred his pulses in an extraordinarily pleasant way. He felt that she would appreciate beautiful things; that to eat her lunch in the shade of an olive tree and to gaze through its grey-green lacework of leaves at pink almond-blossom set against the dazzling blue of the sky would fill her with the same complete satisfaction as it filled him.

That she might not wish to know him, that she might refuse to allow him to speak to her again never dawned upon him. She was probably joining friends. She would scarcely be staying alone at an hotel, unchaperoned and surrounded with strangers. The ladies who had seen her off would never allow this; they had seemed anxious about her, and were evidently people of refinement. About the whole three was that delicate and indefinable air of breeding to which David Wroxham was accustomed in the women of his own family. No, she would not be alone, and he was conscious of deriving pleasure from that thought, nor did it strike him that the fact of her being hedged about by conventional chaperons would probably cause her to be more difficult of access. He felt he would see her again, would talk to her again. He felt it in his bones, his desire was so great; and what David Wroxham had desired up to now he had usually achieved—firstly, because he was a man of great perseverance and enormous

patience; and, secondly, because the gods had been kinder to him than to most.

He kept out of her way when they arrived at Mentone; but he saw that she got into the omnibus of the Hôtel Bella Vista. For himself, after leaving his baggage at the left-luggage office, he went on a tour of inspection of the hotels. His wants he felt to be few and simple. In reality they were immensely difficult to compass all under one roof: a fine view of either mountains or sea, a quiet room, a sufficient number of visitors to make it possible for him to be thoroughly unsociable, and no Germans; and the last was the most difficult to obtain.

Half-past six had struck and Patricia still lay on her bed, busy with her thoughts and refusing to face the hideous ordeal of straightening her room.

At a quarter to seven a maid arrived with hot water. She was German, and conversational. Patricia knew no language but her own—Patrick Hastings would never hear of his daughter going to a foreign school, nor would he permit any but an English governess to enter his house; so all that Patricia knew of foreign languages was some very sketchy and imperfect French, which, as she found to her sorrow and chagrin later on, was not of the slightest use to her.

Now, when the German maid, whose name was Anna, threw up her hands in horror at sight of the chaotic state of the room, and made guttural exclamations and sounds in her throat, all that Patricia did was to say,

"Thank you," quite politely, and intimate that Anna might go. But Anna refused to go. Anna knew that if the young lady before her, who was smiling so sweetly upon her, refused to be persuaded to tidy up her room, that she herself, an overworked *femme de chambre*, would have to do it when the young lady had descended to dinner, and Anna had tired feet, partly because her shoes were too small.

Making many signs with her plump hands at the things lying on the floor, and pointing with encouraging fingers to the wardrobe and pegs behind the door and three small, ill-fitting drawers of the washstand, she intimated to Patricia that she had better be up and doing, and again all that Patricia did was to smile and say "thank you," and begin to unfasten her travelling dress and remove the rings from her fingers preparatory to washing; and was not this enough to provoke any Teutonic maiden of orderly habits and tired, overworked feet? She became almost hysterical in her entreaties that at least Patricia should clear the bed of five hats, four blouses, and a dozen veils, neck ruffles, and pairs of gloves; otherwise how could she turn it down for the night, and after withdrawing Patricia's nightdress from its elegant satin case, arrange it in softly welcoming folds on the white quilt?

Patricia's door stood open, the north wing of the hotel was quiet, just containing a couple of bedrooms, the service rooms and a corner where Jacques, the porter, cleaned the boots.

The room next to Patricia's was occupied by a lady

named Miss Felicity Ruggles. North rooms at hotels are always occupied by women. Miss Ruggles was now standing in Patricia's doorway, staring in in some surprise. She had been on her way to her own room, and hearing Anna's raised, distressed tones, had unconsciously come to a pause. Taking in the situation at a glance, namely, that Patricia's knowledge of German was only a little less than her ability to cope with the limited space of her room, she abruptly offered her assistance.

"Excuse me," she said, "can I be of any help? I sleep next door to you. I see that you don't understand German and that Anna is worrying you. She belongs to the race that is always worrying somebody or other—that is how it tries to solve the conundrum of a necessary expansion. I also see you are not used to unpacking or to making the best use of a space that is limited. I am. I have mastered my room. If you like, I will help you to get yours into a workable condition. It is possible." She spoke in a firm, business-like way. Her manner was brusque and her voice was somewhat harsh, yet it contained a quality, if not exactly sympathetic, at least honest and friendly.

"Thank you very much," said Patricia gratefully, "but I really couldn't allow you——"

"Yes, you could. It will be a pleasure to me; I am a born organiser. When I see that people are incapable I love to take their affairs in hand and manage them myself. That is why a good many people dislike me. Perhaps you have noticed that capable people are

generally disliked. As some one has said very truthfully: 'It is not the good works to which we object, but the good workers.' That man hit the right nail on the head. Now, may I begin?" She smiled as she put the question, and all in a minute Patricia felt she had been warmed right through by an unexpected flash of sunshine. Miss Ruggles had a plain face, but her smile, which revealed a beautiful row of strong, white, even teeth—her smile—well, Patricia, later on, in trying to describe it to Aunt John and Mary, never could find a better simile than "Imagine a dull, bleak moor, dead bracken, dead brown heather, a grey, leaden sky, stagnant black pools, and—suddenly a gleam of bright golden gorse sweetening the air with its subtle fragrance." "Now we'll attack the linen first. Your hats, I should suggest, should go back into the hat-box, which, if I may venture to pass a remark, seems to me the largest I have yet met. Yes—" thoughtfully Miss Ruggles leant back on her haunches—"it is even larger than my friend Enabelle's. It might stand here if we move the washstand a little nearer the door. That's it. Your best blouses, and feather boas, must go in the lid of your trunk; packets of tea, biscuits, might go in the trunk itself. The kettle could stand here on the washstand; your bath under the bed; shoes and boots under the wardrobe; hold-all and bag, now they are empty, on the top; writing materials— Ah, you want a small table. I've demanded one. I'll speak to Miss Cranberry to-morrow——"

"But there's nowhere for it to stand." Anna had

departed, and Patricia sat on the bed in fascinated wonderment and admiration at Miss Ruggles' achievements.

Miss Ruggles appraised the room with the eye of an experienced land surveyor.

"If you had a table, could you manage without a chair?"

"No," said Patricia definitely. "Where could I put my clothes at night?"

"I forgot that. Well, then, your hat-box must join your trunk on the landing. Fortunately you and I and Jacques the porter and the water-cans have it to ourselves." She slithered the hat-box along the floor to the landing, refusing Patricia's help. "Now," she said, looking round triumphantly, "what do you think of that? Oh, there's your work-bag; that can hang on the knob of the bed."

"I think it's been like the fitting together of a jigsaw puzzle. I never saw anything more wonderful, more splendid! and I shall be in your debt to my dying day." Patricia, in her fervour, clasped her hands as though calling upon Heaven to witness her deep and everlasting gratitude to Miss Ruggles.

The gong sounded through the hotel.

"We must get dressed," said Miss Ruggles. "Shall you want your blouse fastened?"

Patricia accepted the proffered help, "And I wonder why you are so kind to a perfect stranger?" she asked.

"Just for something to do," said Miss Ruggles. "I've had a slack day, and I'm so pleased you have

joined me in this backwater. The last occupant of your room was a singer, and she did breathing exercises morning and night. You could hear her drawing in her breath with a sizzling sound like a rocket ascending whilst she raised herself on her toes; then, bang!—the rocket had exploded, and you could positively feel a draught in your room whilst the deflating of her lungs was proceeding.”

Patricia laughed. She liked this eccentric person immensely.

“Come to me when you’re ready for the blouse; I must rush.”

To Patricia’s great delight she found, when she went to be fastened up, that Miss Ruggles had donned a black voile skirt, a rucked silk waistband, and a white, ready-made pongee silk blouse all exactly corresponding to the description Mary had given her of the evening attire adopted by impecunious maiden ladies abroad. Looking more closely, however, she found the skirt sported two flounces only, instead of the three Mary had led her to expect. Patricia felt almost injured at this curtailment. It hardly seemed fair. But presently she brightened. Possibly the voile had been secured as a remnant. Miss Ruggles would be equal to snatching up remnants at the end of half-yearly sales. She was strong and she was determined. Patricia forgave her the lapse of a flounce.

“That dress is far too nice for here,” pronounced Miss Ruggles when she had hooked and eyed Patricia into her bodice.

"It is the only one I brought for evening. My cousin Mary said I shouldn't want much."

"She was right; but *I* call that much. Are you alone?"

"Yes."

"H'm!" said Miss Ruggles.

There seemed to be nothing to say to this observation, so Patricia remained silent.

"Of course, there are only women in the hotel," mused Miss Ruggles.

"*Only* women!"

"Well, very nearly. There are thirty women and nine men. Five of these men are anything between fifty-five and seventy years of age, and are here with their wives—quite nice men, three of them really well-trained husbands; the other two a bit intractable at times. Then, there are four bachelors: a Hungarian, very like the late Prince Consort in appearance, with side whiskers and a noble forehead. He is given to wearing gloves in the garden. A Mr. Lyttleton is a retired school inspector, who appears to labour under the constant impression that he is addressing a large room full of totally deaf children. He simply bellows and tires us all out. Mr. Weeks is a misguided young man with a weak upper lip and a system at Monte Carlo. He sits most of the day in corners with a note-book and pencil, and talks to himself and does elaborate calculations. About once a week he goes to the Casino to put his system to the test. He usually comes back with a headache and takes Benger's food for his dinner. There

is the second gong. I wonder where you will sit. I expect near to Mr. Pennant, because Miss Appleby left to-day."

"And what is Mr. Pennant like?" inquired Patricia as they descended the stairs together and down a long passage to the dining-room.

"Ah!" Miss Ruggles gave an enigmatical smile. "Wait and see."

CHAPTER X

PATRICIA WRITES TO MARY OF THE HÔTEL BELLA VISTA AND THE RIDGE

PATRICIA settled down at the Hôtel Bella Vista as contentedly and naturally as a duck takes to water. She had seen little of the world—the world beyond the somewhat prescribed limits of her own village. Patrick Hastings had been peculiarly insular; and, convinced that nothing outside the British Isles could be pronounced as good, had—beyond a month's visit to London in the height of the season, which he had undertaken with an outward air of resignation but an inward chafing of spirit for the sake of Patricia—entirely confined his travels to the area of the British Isles. Shooting in Scotland, fishing in Ireland, mountaineering in Wales, he had entered into with gusto, and a keen enjoyment, but nothing “foreign” could tempt him. Foreign countries stood to him for bad cooking, bad drains, bad smells, mosquitoes, and certain death. So Patricia, at the age of twenty-five, had seen considerably less of the world than the average girl of sixteen in these modern days of travel, and she embraced her new mode of life with all the freshness of a child. Everything delighted and interested her, from Jacques the porter, cleaning the boots in his little box

of a room on the opposite side of the passage to hers, whilst sentimentally singing "*Voilà ce que je suis sans toi*" to the darting lizards on the sunny walls of the delightful garden.

Here is a letter she despatched to Mary at the end of the first week, a letter written at intervals whilst seated on her bed, in the garden, amongst the pine-trees on the Ridge above the hotel, or in the shade of a mimosa tree, where she cunningly placed herself on a hummocky bit of ground in order that one feathery golden plume should brush her cheek when the south wind came along and gently swayed the branches. It was an untidy, smudgy, blotty letter, but on reading it aloud to Mrs. Moffat on a peculiarly dreary and damp morning, it filled Mary with such a desire to be seeing the things that Patricia was seeing that it left her low and depressed for the remainder of that bleak day.

"MY DEAR MARY:

"I have had your letter, and note that there is not one word of sympathy about the hold-all; and as for your pious correction for my behaviour towards the rude old gentleman, you would have done the same yourself, though perhaps in a milder degree. Where I was violent and perhaps a little hasty, you, with gentle, sinuous and coercive movement of your foot, would have placed him somehow on to the floor; but he would have been unaware that *you* had put him there, and your disarming and sympathetic smile would have al-

most persuaded him into believing he was lying on a bed of roses.

"No, I still don't like my room, and never shall like it, so it's no use your pretending it's a sort of enchanted palace; and it's also no use reminding me that I can descend to the first floor and take a sunny south room at twenty francs a day if I feel so disposed. I know all about that, and what I'm trying to do is *not* to take it. I don't like being poor a bit up to now, and my character is not in the least improving, which, after a week's effort, is discouraging, and I'm not finding myself as capable as I had hoped. I failed dismally on the very evening of my arrival. I could *not* get my things put away, and was just going to leave them lying about the floor, hoping that the chambermaid might be driven to come to the rescue, when a fairy godmother of the name of Miss Felicity Ruggles appeared most magically on the scene, and hey, presto! confusion was reduced to order, and out of it my room emerged neat and nice as an Ideal Home Exhibition.

"I've sold my black moirette petticoat and I hope you won't mind very much. Miss Ruggles happened to admire it as it lay on the bed. I had no idea the world contained so many women who know and love moirette petticoats. I said I would let her have it cheap; I pointed out the under-pocket and named the sum of five francs. She closed at once. You see, I knew I should never wear it again; and as I'd no room to stow it away, it would have had to hang on the end

of the curtain-pole; besides, I wanted the money. But for this providential sale I should have exceeded my allowance this very first week. Nineteen francs seem to have melted like a cheap candle standing in a draught. I don't know where it's gone. There's the 'bus from the funicular down into Mentone. When you're perched on a mountain, it's bound to cost something to get away from it. I should imagine mountains were never cheap. Then, I've bought some sunlight soap, or the equivalent to it, ready for my first wash-day. I'm setting apart one morning in each week for real hard work; but I've not started yet. There's no good hurrying things, and I've sent everything to the laundry this time, because the list in French, Anna presented to me, was so fascinating, I just longed to put a number against each article. A *chemise-de-nuit* sounds such a mysterious garment till you find it's just a plain nightdress.

"Before I proceed further, I must tell you I have forgiven you for sending me to the 'Bella Vista' (though I do not admire your Machiavellian methods of getting me here), because I like it. I like it so much that I'm never going to leave it; and when I die a funeral service will be held over my remains at the monastery of the Annonciata opposite. I know it is closed. I know the poor dear fathers and brothers have been hounded to the four corners of the earth; but it will be opened for my funeral rites, and my body will be put away beneath a rosemary bush close to the little pine-wood.

"I know now, Mary, of what you are thinking when you sit before the fire of a winter evening, with your hands folded in the meek way you adopt, and that thoughtful, happy, reminiscent look on your face. You are thinking of Monsieur Paul P  p  , the proprietor of the 'Bella Vista'; of his vegetable-marrow-shaped bald head, with its encircling fringe of stiff white hair—just like the elegant frill of a pie-dish; of his twinkly, kind eyes and genial smile and fat little legs. You never told me he resembled a music-hall comedian, or of his child-like, beautiful character, or of a nature which loves to give and not receive. I am informed that to insert an extra in a bill makes him feel quite poorly for the rest of the day, and it is on this account that the 'Bella Vista' is full to overflowing, especially with women. Women, Miss Ruggles says, have a special antipathy to extras; they like inclusive all-round terms. A Mrs. Twitter, who is staying here, a large, over-dressed, much-be-feathered lady, burst into tears on being charged threepence for a jug of milk for her afternoon tea, and she's heaps of money. She is always talking about the food—indeed, a good many people have the same propensity. They seem to come abroad for the sole purpose of comparing French with English cooking. 'I like my vegetables with my meat—good, wholesome vegetables, such as cabbage and sprouts, containing healthy salts, and not those silly bits of lentils and haricot beans and globe artichokes with grand-sounding French names, which would not satisfy the appetite of a wood-louse,' bellows a Mr. Lyttleton.

“ ‘I don’t know about that,’ disagreed Mrs. Twitter, who doesn’t like Mr. Lyttleton, because he monopolises so much of the conversation, and lays down the law in a dogmatic, schoolmasterly way; ‘but what I *do* take exception to is the dearth of sauces—and France called “the land of sauces.” When have we had onion sauce?’ she looked at us all challengingly; we were in the lounge after lunch, and Miss Cranberry in the bureau could distinctly hear every word. None of us spoke. ‘And when have we had mint?’ This time her manner was almost menacing. Still none of us spoke. ‘Or bread, or apple—fancy duck without apple sauce!’ Positively there were tears in her voice—‘Or bread, or caper, or mushroom’—now she wrung her hands. ‘I say the French, as a nation, have three sauces only: a brown for stews, a white for fricassée, a mayonnaise for everything else—all excellent but monotonous——’

“ ‘Talking of vegetables,’ broke in a moon-faced youth, who had arrived the night before and of the name of Lapp, ‘I was made to eat them *before* meat, when I was a boy, so as to take the edge off my appetite. When you’ve consumed, say, four whole parsnips, you’ve not much room left for the boiled beef that follows, and I was great on boiled beef when it had been pickled.’

“ Mrs. Twitter intimated that she had not been talking of vegetables. She objected to being interrupted, and she begged of Mr. Lapp never again to allude to parsnips in her presence, as they were her special abomination.

"Did you have the type of Twitter woman when you were at the 'Bella Vista'?"

"She buttonholed me yesterday when I was lounging in the beehive. What a delightful shelter it is! and how cunningly placed, with its thick thatched back to the north and east, and how the sun pours down upon you! and how the beauty of the view stretched at your feet seems to steal into your senses, filling you with such rapturous delight that when the Twitter woman bursts in upon you, you have much ado to keep from rapping out a dreadfully bad word!"

"'Wasn't the rabbit horrible at lunch?' she cried, flinging herself into a *chaise longue* next to mine with an abandon most unseemly in so portly a lady.

"'The rabbit! Why, it was chick——'"

"'No, it wasn't. That's Monsieur Pépé's deceit. He calls it *poulet*, but it was a poulet with four legs and fur, and most cleverly masked with sauce.'

"'But it was delicious,' I ventured.

"'Delicious!' she screamed. 'When I pay for chicken, I expect chicken and not vermin. If you call this food delicious, you have evidently lived on very plain fare.'

"'This was rude, but I kept my temper, because a most heavenly scent of fresias was suddenly wafted across the garden.

"'Then she launched forth into a glowing description of the food she had met in a first-class hotel at Nice. A perfect hotel! Four—no, five different kinds of *hors-d'œuvre* at both lunch and dinner.

"‘Most indigestible,’ said I.

"‘Always two meat dishes.’

"‘Surely bad for rheumatism?’ I ventured.

"‘I have not got rheumatism,’ she snapped.

"‘No——? I was only generalising.’

"She dared me with a look to generalise in her presence. Time was too short for that sort of nonsense; what she wanted to make me understand was the beauty of the food of the Hôtel des Étrangers at Nice. She might have been discussing a poem.

"At last I wondered why she had not remained at the Hôtel des Etrangers. She saw it in my face.

"‘It is this air,’ she explained. ‘I am in poor health. The food is bad, but the air is good. I must try to subsist on it alone.’

"I could hardly keep from laughing. She looked so immense and well-nourished as she lay in her chair.

"‘Plain living and high thought?’ I suggested, but she did not reply. Drowsiness—the drowsiness which follows an excellent and heavy meal—was overtaking her. Soon she was in a profound slumber. A happy expression was on her face; possibly she was dreaming of the five different kinds of *hors-d’œuvre* at Nice.

"And there was all this beauty around her. There was the dear cobble-stoned mule-path up to the Ridge. Mary, I am trying to decide if I love the Ridge best morning or evening. Which do you? I think the evening, when one has it to one’s self and the foreigners are tucked away at the Casino or getting in an extra meal somewhere. When a shadowy greyness is creep-

ing over the mountains, when the pine-trees and olives take on ghostly, mysterious shapes, the white heather and fragrant rosemary become fairy wraiths, and the land is filled with the croaking of frogs.

“ You never told me either of the tumbledown cottage embowered in olive trees at the end of the Ridge, before you drop down sharply to the valley, or of the old man who lives there with fifteen patches on his trousers, and the old woman with eleven patches on her bodice. I *do* like their big red stone water-jars standing in front of the cottage, and their diminutive haycock and tumble-down pergola, and little patches of borage and globe artichokes and beans. They are busy thrashing their olive trees now; the old man climbs the trees, his many-coloured patches standing out beautifully amongst the grey-green foliage, and whacks away at the fruit, and the little old lady stoops and picks it up—weary, back-breaking work; but she seems happy and contented with her lot, and her wrinkled face breaks into smiles as you give her a *bon jour* as you pass.

“ I am hoping that the lemon-grove sloping away to the left of the cottage will prove to be theirs; for how can one subsist on the profits derived from the fruit of five olive trees, a small vine and a patch of beans, borage and globe artichokes, even if one is frugal and economical in one's tastes and desires, and has mastered the whole art of patching? When I know them better and can call myself their friend, I shall venture with great delicacy to put to them the question as to the ownership of the lemon-grove.

"Was there a scarecrow guarding another small allotment when you were here? For in this wonderful climate I can conceive the possibility of a well-made scarecrow going strong for two or three seasons. This one is most elegant in construction and really well dressed—far better turned out than the peasants themselves—a man no longer young, for his shoulders have a pensive droop and his legs are slightly weak in the knees, but this may be because he hangs from the bough of a cork tree; a hanging man must of necessity dangle a little aimlessly about the legs. But his head, which is crowned with a Homburg hat, he holds up bravely to the light, defying the birds, of which there are grievously few, to trespass in his 'back-yard'; and in the wind he gently and miraculously revolves—not swings, but actually revolves—which, I think, is most clever of him.

"The man who owns this allotment is apparently rich, for he wears blue-green trousers without patches, is an inveterate smoker and sings as he tends his vines. He has several long terraces of vineyard cut out of the side of the mountain which slopes down to the Borigo Valley. At the moment he is turning over the soil of the vines with a heavy implement resembling a square inverted pick. He has finished three terraces since I came, and the perspiration pours from his face as he works; but he, too, seems happy and contented. Are all the people happy in this sunny land, I wonder? I go back from my friends the frogs, and the old patched man and woman, and the scarecrow, and the man who

sings, and the serene mountains, and the budding fruit trees, and the rich, fruitful, sweet-scented soil, to Mrs. Twitter, who talks of food, and Mr. Weeks, who mutters in a corner over a system which is to break the bank at Monte Carlo, and I wonder—well, I wonder a lot of things.

“I meant to tell you about Miss Ruggles and the people, and what I have done and seen in the week; but the Ridge has carried me away. I won’t apologise—you know its seductiveness, you know its scents, you know its beauty. It had to be mentioned first—the air cleared, so to speak, before one could pass to other things.

“Dear love to you both.

“Ever your

“PATRICIA.

“I did not tell you in my first letter of a man who befriended me at Calais when I had that dreadful experience with my hold-all. He picked up my patent boots and insisted upon repacking the hold-all. He never smiled. He seemed to take it as a matter of course that one’s boots and shoes *should* lie about platforms. I liked him for it. Afterwards I was rude to him when I rushed away from my carriage in the night. He was standing in the corridor. I was vexed at finding him there. I was in a wild state of deshabille, with my skirts slipping down—I had loosened my waistbands as you directed—and my head tied up as though I’d suddenly contracted mumps. Later on I was nice to him, or tried to be. We were breakfasting near to

one another; but he received my overtures of friendship with a cool indifference, and I felt rather snubbed.

"I never saw him get out of the train, though I watched carefully at every station.

"I've told you all this because you take such an extraordinary interest in every man I meet. There are no men here—I mean none that could arouse your interest in the faintest degree. They are all elderly, or dull, or quite safe, with Conservative principles, wives who keep them well under control, and sound views on the established faith of the Church.

"P. H."

"H'm!" said Mary, musingly, as she laid the letter down. "I wonder why she told us of this man."

"She explained why," returned Mrs. Moffat.

"That was only an excuse. I know Patricia. She's interested in him—unduly. She'll meet him again."

"But how can she? She doesn't even know where he is."

"She'll contrive it somehow, and if *she* doesn't, *he* will. I like the sound of him, and he's apparently a man of spirit."

"What makes you think that?"

"She snubbed him. Then she tried to win him over with her blandishments. He refused to be won."

"Yet you say if *she* doesn't contrive that they shall meet again, *he* will." Aunt John, not being versed in the subtleties of the feminine mind, was unable to follow Mary's reasoning.

"He will forget the snubbing, he will only remember our Patricia's smile. I believe him to be a man I happened to notice at Victoria Station. He was staring very hard at Patricia, and he almost came to a dead stop as he passed—Patricia was crying, and a look of absolute consternation came over his face."

"Oh!" Mrs. Moffat was becoming very interested; a long, dull morning was ahead, and she'd nothing exciting at the moment to read. "What was he like?"

"He was a man of quite ordinary size, neither tall nor short, just the sort of well-groomed, well-dressed Englishman you meet everywhere about the streets of London. I fancy his shoulders were broad—but it might have been his overcoat that made them look so."

"And his face——"

"Ah! that is another matter; it was rather—arresting."

"But what was it like? An arresting face doesn't convey anything to me." Mrs. Moffat was accustomed to her heroes having dark, sombre eyes full of smouldering fire, sardonic smiles, and Greek noses, with dilating nostrils when roused.

"I don't quite know."

"But you must have noticed if he were dark or fair, a moustache or clean-shaven, brown or blue eyes?"

"No, I didn't. He was clean-shaven—I think; his cap was pulled well over his brow, so I couldn't see if he were dark or fair, and his eyes—well—they didn't strike me as being of any particular colour."

"I don't think he sounds at all attractive," said

Mrs. Moffat, picking up *The Fortnightly Review*, which she compelled herself to glance through as being good for her soul and stimulating to her intellect, and opening it at a dull article on eugenics.

"But he was," persisted Mary. "Strangely enough, I have thought of his face several times since that morning."

"It doesn't seem to have left much impression on you, anyway," observed Mrs. Moffat; and with a smothered sigh she attacked the subject of eugenics.

CHAPTER XI

MR. DAVID WROXHAM TAKES AN UNUSUAL AMOUNT OF EXERCISE

MARY was quite right. Mr. David Wroxham made several attempts to again meet Miss Patricia Hastings; but for many days they proved to be quite ineffectual. He had bad luck. While he was slowly and laboriously ascending the steep and tortuous mule-track which led to the Hôtel Bella Vista, Patricia was descending by the funicular and carriage road to Mentone. And when he elected, the day being warm and sunny, to ascend by the easy carriage road and funicular, she took it into her head to go down by the mule-path. On seven separate days he visited the "Bella Vista"; he walked about the charming garden; he took tea on the terrace which commanded such an enchanting view of Mentone in the distance, and the sea; he wandered up to the Ridge; he prowled about the orange- and lemon-groves; he penetrated into the pine-wood; he sat on a rock and made a pencil sketch of the monastery, with its little cross and flag set against the blue background of sky, and never once did he catch a glimpse of Patricia; and all that he had to show for his pains at the end of a week was a pair of much worn boots and a distinctly frayed temper.

"She can't be at the 'Bella Vista,'" he growled one

day. "Yet her name's in the paper. There can't be two Patricia Hastings." In the afternoons he frequented *les jardins publics* and listened to the band, whilst eagerly scanning every girl who came his way; some of whom were visibly pleased and flattered by this attention, and glanced at him coquettishly from beneath their large hats, only to be met by an indifferent and cool stare. He haunted tea-rooms which were hot and overcrowded, and compelled himself to eat indigestible cakes, little realising that Patricia could not dream of running to such an extravagance as tea "outside," and was at the moment perched on a trunk in Miss Ruggles' room, where she had brought her cup and saucer and roll and butter, and was sharing that good lady's daily threepennyworth of milk. And so, whilst Mr. Wroxham was suffering real torture at being crammed cheek by jowl with noisy Germans in noisy tea-rooms, Patricia was having hers comfortably in a most peaceful and pleasant environment; and whilst she was enjoying the life of the Hôtel Bella Vista to the full, eagerly embracing every novel and fresh experience that came her way, going for long expeditions into the mountains with Miss Ruggles and other newly-made friends, her lunch in a basket slung over her shoulder, a stout stick in her hand, stout boots upon her feet, and laughter in her eyes and upon her lips, and the sun shining bravely overhead, he was bored to death at his hotel; bored with the men who *would* insist upon making overtures of friendship to him in the smoke-room, telling him interminable yarns of their

feats at golf, or mountain-climbing, or big-game shooting, or roulette, or whatever their special hobby happened to be at the moment; bored with the middle-aged ladies who pounced upon him after dinner to make a fourth at bridge, and who, when he politely and smilingly refused, became so pleadingly insistent that he had to hide himself in his room; bored with the foreigners who shouted from sheer exuberance of animal spirits, fostered by good living and pleasant surroundings and a knowledge that the English hadn't it all their own way now, that there were other nations to be reckoned with, other nations who had begun to travel, with well-lined pockets and—well, the English had better begin to take a back seat in a becoming manner; and even bored with the young and pretty girls with their slim attractiveness and healthy laughter, and upon whom Wroxham, from his superior height of thirty-five years, had always looked, if not with interest, at least with a sympathetic and fatherly indulgence. Yes, he was hopelessly and painfully dull. Each day he asked himself why he had come to Mentone, why he was not at Taormina busy with his work! At the thought of work he bought canvases, brushes, paints, a palette, but they lay unused in his room, merely littering up the place and creating more dust for the busy *femme-de-chambre* to remove. He bought a guide-book to Mentone—at least he would see what there was to be seen; but he saw nothing. Twice he got as far as the station and the train for Monte Carlo, but the crowds of well-dressed, noisy people struggling and

levering themselves into the immensely high and almost inaccessible (to the stout and short) carriages, left him feeling tired; and, merely tearing up his ticket, he retraced his footsteps to *les jardins publics*, or once again climbed the mule-path to the "Bella Vista." He grew familiar with every inch of that mule-path, from the wide, shallow steps which started the ascent—steps which cheated the ignorant into believing that the way was wide and easy all the way up—to the final stony, almost perpendicular bit, where, panting after the strain, one flung one's self on to a ledge of rock commanding an inexpressibly beautiful view of sea and Cap Martin shining in the sunlight, and vowed but for that Heaven-created view one would for ever remain in the valley below.

And not only did the shoes and temper of Mr. Wroxham begin to show signs of wear after so much strenuous exertion, but he began to lose weight. Even a man in the prime of life and of undoubtedly fine physique (in spite of Mary's view to the contrary) cannot tear up and down mountains two or three times a day without showing it.

"She's not worth it," he told himself one day, whilst scanning with eagerness every figure attired in female clothing that appeared along the mule-path. "She may be interesting—I'll admit that; but she's too independent, too emancipated. Fancy *kicking* a fellow-passenger on to the floor and owning up to it too—in fact, *glorying* in it! Whatever the man may have

done—merely wanted the window shut I'll take my oath—she'd no right to have proceeded to such extreme measures. I *do* like a woman to be feminine before everything else, and—gentle." . . . He paused, a vision of a face, the face of a girl leaning from a carriage window of a train at Victoria, with her eyes full of tears and a quivering mouth, all sweetness and tenderness, floated before his eyes in spite of himself. "Oh, yes!" he exclaimed testily, addressing a small lizard that was basking in the sun whilst keeping a wary outlook on Wroxham's movements, "that's all right. She was touched for the time being. All women are when they are saying good-bye to their friends, in the same way that people are moved when 'The Dead March' in 'Saul' comes pealing down the aisles of a cathedral; it doesn't mean anything really. Why, the next moment she was screaming with laughter and flinging bags of oranges on to the line, with, I presume, the bloodthirsty desire of wrecking the next train that came along that way. Hum! I don't call that being feminine and kindly! And the way she addressed me in that corridor, just as though the train belonged to her and I didn't fit in with her scheme of decoration; and the peremptoriness of her tone when she demanded at what time the sun rose! I might have been an expert from Greenwich Observatory specially on tap for her benefit. And then—and then—— Don't go away," this to the lizard, who was becoming anxious at the violent play this queer man was making with his pipe, "I've not finished yet. She went to sleep in the corridor on

a hard little seat, with her head propped against a hard piece of wooden panelling and her body all swaying about at a most dangerous angle with the movement and vibration of the train, and I, every moment, expecting to have to rush out and pick her up and put her back while she once again flew in a temper and made me feel it was all my fault. No, don't go, old chap. I won't hurt you. There, I won't smoke any more or so much as move a finger, so don't get scared. I want to finish telling you about this tiresome young person. She tried afterwards to make up to me at breakfast—smiled upon me as though she couldn't be rude if she tried; such a smile, and such teeth! And her hair all bright and breaking away in little curly ends from beneath her hat—not in itself a pretty hat” (he frowned severely), “indeed, it was an outrageous thing in hats, now I come to think of it, but—somehow it suited her. And she wore neat brown shoes (her skirts were rather short, not too short, but sensible for travelling), and she's lots of other shoes as well. I know all about them because I helped to pack 'em—patent, and bronze, and white, and ridiculous small pointed satin ones with high heels, in which she's certain to break her neck—in fact, far too many for one person to be taking about with her. And I expect she's tons of clothes in that great trunk of hers I saw at the station here; she looks expensive, and she'll go strutting about at the Casinos and in the gardens and along the promenade of a morning just like any other over-dressed, self-conscious English miss. Old chap, I've done with her. I'm dead sick of this

place, and to-morrow I leave for Taormina. While you're basking beside that clump of thyme and wriggling your small, lithe body in and out of the stones and up and down this bank, I shall be sweating away in trains. Good-bye, lizard, and good luck to you."

Mr. Wroxham twice slipped on loose stones in descending the mule-path, and on each occasion he used a bad word. Smithers and Richy Dick would have been shocked at the rapid downward course of their master, and inexpressibly pained.

The following morning, which was unusually brilliant and full of lovely scents of the sea and flowers hot in the sun, found Mr. Wroxham not "sweating" in a train for Taormina, but seated, clad in white flannels, in the shade of a palm at that corner of *les jardins publics* which gives on to the promenade and the sea—a corner which commands a good view of the "Félix Faure," three separate and distinct paths of the gardens, and the promenade itself. The palm was of the low-growing variety, with wide-spreading and fan-like leaves. Seated beneath it with the *Continental Daily Mail* before him, Wroxham could scarcely be seen by the passer-by, whilst he himself from his cool point of vantage, with eyes undazzled by the sun, could scrutinise calmly every person that came along that way.

Suddenly he saw Patricia.

She was dressed all in white and looked as fresh as the morning itself: a white serge skirt, white silk blouse and wide-brimmed shady straw hat trimmed with one

big white rose—of an impossible and ridiculous size, but amazingly pretty and *chic*—nodding there alone.

Mary would have been full of condemnation had she encountered Patricia in such a costume, seeing that she was about to embark upon a donkey expedition into the mountains and would in all probability return from it as black as a sweep. Mary would have referred to the price of “cleaning” on the French Riviera with a solemn shake of her head, whereat Patricia might have laughed, for in these early days of rigid economy which she had imposed upon herself Patricia sometimes forgot her straitened circumstances and launched forth in a manner truly reckless and lavish.

Miss Ruggles accompanied her—a Miss Ruggles most suitably and sensibly attired in a grey tweed skirt—the unattractive, utilitarian species of grey warranted not to show the dust, a white, ill-fitting, nun’s veiling blouse—nun’s veiling, being all wool yet light, Miss Ruggles conceived was a most desirable material for a climate subject to such changes of temperature as that of the South of France—a burnt-straw hat adorned with a black quill, once fierce and upstanding, no doubt, but now, after many chastening experiences, merely moulting depressedly; and black cotton gloves with too long fingers. The *tout ensemble* not smart by any manner of means, but to which Miss Ruggles was beautifully and happily indifferent.

The moment she had stopped “trying to look nice”—an impossible feat, she declared—she began to be happy. She had for years been trying to achieve mir-

acles, she told Patricia, namely to "dress" herself on fifteen pounds a year. And on the day she discovered that this could not be done, and that she could merely "clothe" herself on such an amount, she began to feel at peace with the world. No one expected anything of her, and she had become reconciled to the face and figure that confronted her from the mirror.

This morning her lips were smiling broadly, revealing her strong, white, even teeth, and her whole person radiated good spirits, good health and a general *joie de vivre*. She liked Patricia, who possessed that very charming quality of making other women, however old and plain, feel at their best; the day was delightful, with just sufficient tang and freshness in the air to temper the heat of the sun's rays, and they were going on donkeys on one of her favourite expeditions into the mountains up to Ste. Agnèse.

Patricia did not see Wroxham, though they paused within a stone's throw of where he was seated. She was far too busy running her eye over the donkeys drawn up in a line along the promenade. Carefully she appraised each in turn.

"I am not light," she said, "I must have a good strong beast and surefooted."

"You can't be more than eight stone," said Miss Ruggles.

"I turn the scales at nine," laughed Patricia gaily. "Now which do *you* fancy? *I've* fallen in love with this black one."

Wroxham, by slightly leaning forward and holding

to one side a palm-leaf, could view the whole scene as well as hear every word of their conversation.

"What's his name?" she demanded in French of a bright-eyed boy who was holding the animal by its bridle. Her accent, Wroxham perceived, was by no means good.

"Gustav, mam'zelle."

"Well, Gustav shall have the honour of bearing me to Ste. Agnèse. How much will he want for the job?"

"Seven francs," interposed Miss Ruggles; "I paid that when I was here last year. I shall have Véronique; I've ridden her before—a nice, gentle, well-behaved ass."

"But seven francs seems a lot of money," mused Patricia doubtfully; "I had no idea the day would cost so much; I ought to have asked you about it before." She seemed quite distressed, and Miss Ruggles felt worried and unhappy and, at the same time, a little mystified and almost annoyed. She was of the opinion, herself being intensely practical, that Patricia should manage her money affairs better. As she stood before her now—an elegant figure, with a scrap of lovely hand-worked *Broderie Anglaise* flounce peeping below her white skirt she looked the very last girl in the world who would be under the necessity of considering ways and means. Indeed, as Miss Ruggles had that very morning written to a close friend in England, she was unable to make Miss Hastings out; she was a mystery. She occupied a box of a north room at eight francs a day, and appeared in the most ravishing costumes,

which, although simple in outline and material, were perfect in cut and all mounted on silk (poor Miss Ruggles had only possessed one silk-lined gown in her life, and that had been for this friend's wedding, and had split at the seams before the day was over). She haggled about the size of her laundry bill, whilst drawing her purse from a priceless gold-chain bag, and she eagerly snapped at a few francs for a black moirette petticoat, whilst placing on her head a hat with a white lancer plume which must have cost five pounds (for the feather alone).

For a quite considerable length of time now, as it appeared to Miss Ruggles, and all too short to Wroxham, Patricia stood with her eyes thoughtfully fixed on the dancing sun-kissed waves of the Mediterranean, considering what she should do. Was she justified in spending so large a sum of money as seven francs on one expedition alone?

"Of course, I could sell my india-rubber bath and wash myself by bits in the bowl," she announced; and Wroxham positively gasped behind his screen of leaves.

"That would bring me in at least ten or fifteen francs, and my room is really too small to hold it. I always have to move my furniture about before I can fill it in a morning. I have become as expert as a Maple's removal man, or a dome of silence. Of course, bathing in a bowl is a lengthy process."

"Very," agreed Miss Ruggles with feeling, "and don't you think if we were to discuss——"

"No, it's all right. No one can hear us, and these

donkey people don't understand." (Mr. Wroxham felt extremely guilty, and withdrew still more into the shade.) "I believe Mr. Pennant would buy it. I happened to hear him say how much he was wanting one for the Hoaxe."

Miss Ruggles smiled. "You mean in which to bath the immortal tyke?"

"Yes. Monsieur Pépé has courteously but firmly objected to his being immersed in the large one, even if he *is* in his second incarnation and descended from a line of Ancient Egyptian dogs which hunted cheetah for Amen-Hotep, the King."

Now this observation so mystified, and, at the same time, so interested Wroxham that he could scarce refrain from revealing himself by coming from beneath the palm-tree and demanding an explanation of its meaning. He had studied a little Egyptian history—he was familiar with the lives and doings of the Pharaohs. Who was the Hoaxe of whom Patricia so glibly and familiarly talked?

But the donkey attendants were becoming bored by the vacillating behaviour and inconsequential chatter of the English miss. If they were going to Ste. Agnèse, they'd better go. Time was passing; the mule-path by which they must make the ascent was steep and stony and circuitous. In vehement, pictorial and persuasive language they drew attention to the beauty and strength and soundness of wind and limb of the asses Gustav and Véronique, of the evenness of their temper, of the swiftness of their action. To hear them talk one would

have imagined Gustav and Véronique positively skipped up the hills like goats and breasted the steep sides of Ste. Agnèse with the agility of a chamois.

"Very well," said Patricia, recklessly flinging expense to the wind. "Mr. Pennant shall have my bath for the Hoaxe. *Garçon, votre main.*"

She gave him her pretty white-shod foot with as much confidence as she presented it to Thompson, her most expert of grooms, and the next instant she was shot across the donkey's back and lay on the promenade—one foot suspended from the stirrup—a bewildering mass of frilly white garments, while Pierre, the donkey-boy, cheerfully and encouragingly yelled: "*Cou-rage, mam'zelle! Cou-rage! Ça ne va pas bouger!*"

It was all over. Patricia was on her feet again—placed there by Wroxham. She was not hurt; she was scarcely soiled; her hat had scarcely moved, but her temper——! For one brief cowardly moment Wroxham was for stealing away, hiding himself anywhere, anyhow, so long as he got out of her sight. Then he stood his ground. On two previous occasions he had allowed himself to be bullied by this young person with flashing eyes and scarlet cheeks and quivering lips! She should not do it again. The misfortunes that overtook her whenever he was in the near neighbourhood were not his fault, as he meant to point out, but merely a most unfortunate coincidence.

But Patricia was in no mood for reason or logic.

"Thank you," she cried pantingly; "thank you very much indeed. I am *most* grateful for your help; but——"

"Yes?" His eyes met hers unflinchingly.

"It is most extraordinary that you——"

"That I——?" His tone was absolutely calm and polite.

"Should always be about when——" she hesitated.

"When you are in difficulties."

"When I am in absurd and ridiculous and most ignominious situations."

"It is my good fortune, it appears to me," he said gravely and humbly.

"Hum!" she cried.

"The boy was most careless. A misplacement of energy. He wants a good thrashing. You are not hurt, I hope?"

She ignored his solicitude. "Where were you?" she demanded.

"Not a stone's-throw away. I happened to be sitting beneath that palm-tree reading my paper."

She threw the palm a blasting look.

"It is strange I did not see you, especially as you are in white flannels."

"You had your back to me and—you were busy talking."

She looked at him suspiciously and her cheeks flushed to a still deeper hue.

"Could you—could you . . . did you happen to hear what I said?"

"You spoke of the price of the donkeys." His gaze was on the sea.

"Anything else?"

"You mentioned your weight." Now he was watching a small yacht breasting the waves like a white-winged bird.

"And was that all?"

He did not speak.

"O—owh!" The exclamation seemed to be wrung from her.

"You see——" he began soothingly, but she interrupted him.

"You are always——"

"I am always——?"

"About."

"France is a free country," he observed.

"Of course, but——"

"Yes?"

"It does seem strange that we should meet so often."

"Not at all"—his attitude was firm—"if you come to reflect upon the position. We happened to travel by the same train from England; then from Paris——"

"I know, I know." She began to feel a little ashamed of herself. "But that we should both have come to Mentone." . . . She endeavoured to smile to soften her words.

"Mentone is a fair-sized place. If you will look around you will see there are quite a number of people here. May I ask—did you expect to have the town to yourself?"

"Oh, no. I——" Then Patricia's sense of humour came to the rescue. Her galling experience of a few moments back she put from her. This man she already liked so much in theory, and upon whom her thoughts had so often dwelt during the last week, she found to be even nicer than her imagination had conceived him to be. She liked the way he frowned upon her, and with a stiffening backward movement of his exceedingly square shoulders refused to be browbeaten.

"Forgive me," she cried suddenly. "I am sorry—sorry for appearing so churlish and ungrateful and rude. It is only that my pride is hurt. You always appear to see me when I am at a disadvantage and sort of down on my luck. First there were my boots and shoes lying about the platform at Calais. Then I encounter you after—after——"

"You'd kicked a fellow-passenger on to the floor."

Patricia could not detect a gleam or a flicker of amusement in his grave eyes, so she could not get annoyed again.

"What!" Miss Ruggles was quite unable to prevent this exclamation from escaping her. She had been breathlessly interested in their conversation, and had at once taken a great liking to this nice and obviously well-bred Englishman. Miss Hastings had not told her that she was acquainted with anybody in Mentone, and Miss Ruggles wondered why. At once she scented a romance.

"Yes," said Patricia. "Some day I will tell you about it when I know you better and are sure you will

approve of what I did. A fellow-passenger annoyed me. I felt compelled to take strong measures, as there was no one present to take them for me. And then"—she again turned to Wroxham—"the next time I meet you I——"

"Is now," said Wroxham quietly, and for the first time he permitted the admiration he felt for this girl who treated him so cavalierly to creep into his eyes, and beneath his long and earnest scrutiny Patricia found herself colouring vividly.

"We were going," she continued a little tremulously, "to Ste. Agnèse on donkeys when this boy——"

"I know, I know." Wroxham wished her to forget the unfortunate episode as fast as she could. Women would rake up things so. "And, fortunately, you were not hurt; that is the great point. Where and what is Ste. Agnèse?"

"It is up in the mountains—the ruined remains of an old castle from which a most glorious view is obtained."

"See," said Miss Ruggles, turning her back to the promenade, "if you look up there you will find a small white building placed on the edge of a platform, with a sheer drop of some hundreds of feet beneath it. That is the restaurant of Ste. Agnèse. Behind you will see against the sky the jagged, broken outline of the walls of the castle, which still remain standing."

With his eyes Wroxham swept the grand panorama of mountains of the Alpes Maritimes. "I have got it," he said at length. "There seem to be two white eyes staring at you from the castle."

"That's it," said Miss Ruggles. "It is the sky seen through two large cavities in one of the tumble-down walls. I've often noticed it."

Wroxham gazed at the castle longingly.

"There must be a grand view from there." He spoke to Miss Ruggles, but looked at Patricia; and, as Miss Ruggles said afterwards, so persuasively, so humbly and so pleadingly that she wondered Patricia had the heart to resist him. And all that Patricia did was to agree that the view must indeed be fine, and mention that they ought to be proceeding on their expedition or they would be late.

"Yes," said Wroxham. "I must not detain you. Will you permit me to assist you to mount? I should not trust myself again to this boy. Now——"

Obediently Patricia placed her foot in his hand, and when she was seated and he had dexterously and carefully arranged her skirts about her, and after assisting Miss Ruggles, had raised his hat and left them, she found herself wishing most ardently that she had invited him to accompany them. It would have been an unconventional act; but, then, had she not come abroad to be unconventional and to do as she pleased? And had they not met under somewhat exceptional circumstances?

"I know, I know," she said at length a little irritably to Miss Ruggles' thrice-repeated observation that it would have been very pleasant if he could have joined them on their expedition (Miss Ruggles liked men and always treated them with a most genial *camaraderie*);

"but how *could* I invite him? I scarcely know him; we have never been formally introduced; he would probably have thought it most presumptuous and forward of me if I had."

"Never been formally introduced!" Miss Ruggles succeeded in betraying a fine scorn. "A man who appears to have helped you out of two or three difficult situations, and finally to have seen you lying on your back on the promenade of Mentone, and who stared at you with the eyes of a hungry dog when you so curtly said good-bye!"

"If you were so keen on the hungry dog, why didn't you ask him yourself?" demanded Patricia whilst giving her donkey such a sudden, unexpected bang with her parasol that it actually galloped for a full half minute, leaving Miss Ruggles behind talking into space.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH OUR HERO JOINS OUR HEROINE AT A LITTLE PICNIC

WROXHAM spent a dull day. He walked to the Rochers Rouges by the sea, and stared at a long skeleton of a primeval man reposing in a glass case in a cave, whilst thinking of Patricia gaily ascending mountains. He returned to his hotel and lunched off macaroni and gnocchis, and various other starchy foods, whilst picturing Patricia perched on the top of one of those mountains eating sandwiches. In the afternoon he screwed up sufficient energy and courage to fight his way into one of the overcrowded carriages of a train bound for Monte Carlo, and, whilst lazily placing five-franc pieces on numbers that never by any chance turned up, and wondering if the stout women present and the German Jews were really enjoying the vitiated atmosphere of the "rooms," visualised Patricia in her white gown seated against a cool grey rock, her cheek fanned by the sweet-scented air that had passed over snowy summits, and drinking tea from her thermos.

"I shall leave to-morrow," he once more told himself with a groan, as a spinster English lady, in her eagerness to secure her winnings, nearly jabbed out one of his eyes with her hat-brim. He left the tables and strolled along the front, his sense of the beautiful

unconsciously revolted by the grotesque figures of the fashionably-dressed women, with their short, tight skirts, immense heels; hats pulled over their hair and ears, giving them the appearance of horses in blinkers, and bombulating fleshy hips.

He drank tea at a small café up the hill beyond the gardens, and watched more stout ladies, regardless of their waist measurements, with plate and fork in hand, wander round the premises selecting indigestible-looking cakes and *éclairs* for their own consumption.

Once again he returned to his hotel, and then he brightened a little. His trunk had arrived from Taormina. Lovingly he handled brushes and paints and canvases. He spread them out on his bed and looked at them. New brushes were not like old. Wroxham was a man who loved his possessions. He was faithful to old pipes, old tobacco-pouches, old card-cases, cigar-cutters of obsolete make, old-fashioned pipe-cleaners, fountain-pens that leaked and refused to write without a vigorous preliminary shake. He disliked taking up with what he called new-fangled ideas. He was conservative in everything but his politics. So, with a pleased, contented expression, he ran his brushes through his fingers and patted tubes of paint. Seating himself by the open window with a block on his knee, he rapidly sketched in a sunset scene. It was finished in half an hour—a tender little bit of warm, glowing colour, perfect in every sense, in conception and in treatment; brilliant, yet giving hint of a quiet mysticism—the mysticism of sunset. For who has not ex-

perienced the sensation, when gazing with rapt eyes at the trails of glory in the west, that momentarily the veil has been lifted and the beauty of the kingdom beyond has been revealed?

When the first gong sounded for dinner, with a sigh he reluctantly laid the little sketch aside. Inspiration, which for a week had been in abeyance, had suddenly taken hold of him.

"To-morrow," he said, "I will go up the mule-path and paint—something." He had forgotten that he had said he was leaving on the morrow. The "something" that his soul desired to paint beyond everything else in the world was a girl in white coming through the old gateway of the "Bella Vista." He was perfectly well aware that the fulfilment of this desire would not be vouchsafed to him; still he allowed his fancy to dwell upon it. He thought of it through the soup and fish courses, and he was still thinking of it while dissecting an unripe banana. Indeed, when he fell asleep at twelve o'clock that night, he left Patricia in her white gown in the same old place in the gateway, and she must have been pretty tired out.

Ten o'clock the following morning saw him, equipped with his sketching materials, a large white umbrella and his lunch, once again toiling up the mule-path to the Ridge above the "Bella Vista."

He seated himself on the large flat rock at the corner by the frog-pond upon which so many amateur artists—chiefly ladies—took up a position from which

to transmit to paper their conception of the monastery in varying degrees of badness.

At first his gaze was not entirely concentrated upon the old building; indeed, he stared more at the gateway of the Hôtel Bella Vista than at the monastery beyond.

Certainly it was a picturesque gateway set between stone walls of huge, unchiselled, irregular sandstone blocks, to which ferns and flowering creepers clung, and which gave one the impression at first glance of having been hewn or tunnelled out of the living rock. Still, in itself, the gateway was not so architecturally beautiful as to absorb the attention of an artist for ten minutes on end. Perhaps appreciating this after a time, Wroxham, with a sigh, removed his eyes from it to the monastery. Perhaps it also dawned upon his slow intelligence that if a figure which he sought *should* come through the gateway and either ascend or descend the mule-path, he could not, short of being suddenly struck stone-blind, fail to see it. Patricia should not escape him to-day.

After adjusting his white umbrella, for the sun was hot, and fixing up his easel and block, he washed in a sky of purest blue (he was painting in water-colours), and soon became absorbed in his subject. He was a rapid worker. At the end of an hour's time he paused, head on one side, to consider what he had done, and an expression—almost a smile—of satisfaction passed across his up-to-now frowning countenance. Wroxham, when he painted, invariably looked as though he were fighting an unseen enemy, and men who dropped into

his studio for five minutes' gossip often retreated at sight of his grim mouth without so much as uttering a word. The Monastery of the Annonciata, dull, unattractive subject as it was when portrayed by the lady amateurs, through this man's genius had suddenly become one of the things that count, that live, that are immortal. And during this hour of inspiration Patricia had been forgotten.

Then her voice fell upon his ear and, with a little shock of surprise, he came back to the workaday world. She was coming up the mule-path carrying in one hand a basket of fruit, in the other a paint-box and a sketch-book, and the paint-box and sketch-book were another shock to Wroxham—instinctively he knew she would paint badly.

She was accompanied by Miss Ruggles, dressed in brown Lolland, too tight across the chest—holland when it has been washed invariably gives the wearer of it a compressed and skewered appearance—and uneven at the hem; and a small, thin, red-haired man, followed by a white, wire-haired terrier which walked with slow and sedate footsteps. Wroxham at once surmised that the man must be the Mr. Pennant of whom Patricia had spoken the previous day, and the dog Hoaxe of Ancient Egyptian genealogy. Patricia was wearing a white linen gown, and behind her head was tilted a white parasol.

Before ever they reached him, Wroxham had sworn to himself definitely and determinedly that somehow or another, by what means he at present knew not, he

should wring from them an invitation to join them at their luncheon-party. He knew for a certainty that they would stop to examine and criticise his painting, and his heart failed him a little at the prospect—even Patricia might be guilty of banalities. He had always been curiously sensitive and opposed to the discussion of his work; it shrivelled him up. He sought neither praise nor blame. His art, whether good or bad, the outcome of genius or hideous mediocrity, was part of himself, part of his soul, his spirit, his very flesh and blood; and when persons bandied it about lightly, carelessly, even if appreciatively, it was to him as though they had cut his body up into small portions and were anatomically dissecting them beneath the penetrating rays of a microscope.

So when the little party stopped, he unconsciously braced himself for the worst; but Patricia rarely did the expected thing. After she and Miss Ruggles had given him a most friendly "Good-morning," and had, with his permission, examined his sketch for some considerable time, she announced calmly that she considered his foreground was wrong if he would excuse her mentioning the fact.

Now Wroxham was so absolutely taken aback by this observation that he was unable to prevent a slight gasp escaping him, and Patricia, fearing she might have offended him by her outspokenness, endeavoured to modify her criticism by suggesting encouragingly that it generally *was* one's foreground that went astray—Wasn't it?

"Mine are quite a bugbear," she said brightly. "In some way they get hopelessly involved with my background. I seem to be unable to procure a middle distance. I just have a foreground very sharply defined, such as yours for instance——" she tilted back her parasol and, stooping, examined the sketch before her with the eye and manner of a connoisseur—"You see what I mean, don't you?"

"You think it is too sharp, too clear cut, not suggestive enough?" His lips twitched as he put the question and he passed his hand over his mouth.

Again, imagining he was offended, she tried to be kind. "Oh, no, I think it is quite good; in fact, very good in itself; but what I mean is, it converges too abruptly on to your background; it is too sudden, it gives one a shock. The eye should travel naturally, gently, by slow and easy stages, to your distant effect. As it is it—it distresses one—seeing how good it *might* be, by its lack of cohesion. It is difficult to explain." . . . (If Wroxham's circle of almost hysterical admirers could but have heard her!)

"I think I know what you mean," he said very gravely. (Wroxham was human himself. He more than appreciated the fact that Patricia meant somehow to get straight with him over the boot and shoe and donkey misfortunes, and if she elected to do so by the means now at her hand, why let her, and bless her.) "You wish to suggest I have no half-way house, so to speak; the transition, say, from this clump of rosemary, these myrtle bushes, the group of pines, the lump

of rock in the pathway, to the monastery standing high and white and stark against the skyline is too violent?"

"That's it!" she cried delightedly; "*I* have done the monastery, and *I* experienced the same difficulty." She glanced at the sketch-book in her hand hesitatingly.

"May I see it?" he asked.

She looked at Miss Ruggles and Mr. Pennant; she was keeping them waiting. It struck her, too, that she was again talking in far too intimate a fashion to this man whose name she still did not know, but into whose arms Fate seemed inclined to fling her on every conceivable occasion. What must Miss Ruggles and Mr. Pennant think of her?

But she, Patricia, did not occupy Miss Ruggles' thoughts in the smallest degree. They were entirely taken up with Wroxham, who attracted her even more than he had on the previous day. She had just decided that a man of his build and colouring should live in grey flannel suiting by day and grey flannel pyjamas by night; that he sketched divinely; that his courteous forbearance with Patricia was most admirable, and that she should invite him to join them on their picnicking expedition whether Patricia approved or otherwise.

"Yes, show your sketch to—to the gentleman. We have not the pleasure of knowing your name." She smiled at Wroxham in friendly fashion.

"My name is Wroxham—David Wroxham. I live in London when I'm at home."

"So do I," said Miss Ruggles; "quite—quite a re-

markable coincidence, seeing there are some seven millions of people scattered about the metropolis." They all laughed.

"My name is Ruggles, not Mrs., but Miss Felicity Ruggles, a most infelicitous combination as you will perceive. Miss Hastings you are already acquainted with, and this is our good friend Mr. Pennant, from gallant little Wales, and his dog Hoaxe. We are all staying at the 'Bella Vista' below, and we are all agreed that it is the most charming hotel in the world, and that its owner, Monsieur Paul P  p  , is the most genial of proprietors and is a delightful and most fascinating mixture of Mr. Pickwick, Don Quixote and Colonel Newcome."

Wroxham lifted his hat high to the ladies and bowed low to Mr. Pennant, who returned it with a brief nod. His heart went out to kind, brisk Miss Ruggles, who was so friendly and un-English. At last he felt he was getting on. He looked at Patricia again, and he looked persuasively at her sketch-book, and she looked doubtfully at the ground. His sketch might not be good—really good, but she was not at all sure that it was not better than her own. Besides, were they not detaining him?

He read her thought.

"I shall be deeply grateful if you will show me your work. Perhaps by an exchange of suggestions and ideas we should be able to assist one another——" (Oh, David, David! Could but Smithers and Richy Dick have heard you—you whom they deemed the soul

of honour and truth.) "But here—there is nowhere to sit." He glanced around as though expecting to chance upon a sudden armchair. "This rock might soil your skirt, and it is difficult to examine a book while standing; I see it is a most interesting-looking, bulky book"—he embraced it with his eyes—"but some of its pages, I perceive from their projecting edges, are loose; might they not blow about in the wind?"

"Exactly," said Miss Ruggles. "This is not the place to talk art, far too public and hot, and I know what people are when they once begin; they are even worse than those with the literary taint. For the first five minutes Mr. Pennant and I would be interested——"

"I shouldn't," interrupted that gentleman.

"Oh!" said Miss Ruggles; "well, I should. At the end of ten we should be exhausted. In fifteen minutes we should be in the final stage of dissolution. Shouldn't we, Mr. Pennant?"

"I am now," he replied briefly. "I am very hungry, and so is the Hoaxe. Won't you," he addressed Wroxham, "come along with us? We are going to lunch in the little orange-grove near the old water-wheel. Perhaps you know it, it's a delightful spot? We've not known you long—at least, I haven't, but we're unconventional, and we're all quite respectable, and you look the same." He spoke in a somewhat breathless fashion, and then, without waiting for a reply, seized Wroxham's umbrella and easel, saying he'd not much himself to carry, and set off at a rapid pace up the hill.

Interrogatively Wroxham looked at the ladies, his

heart beating high with hope that they would second the quaintly-expressed invitation.

"Yes, *do* come," said Miss Ruggles, before Patricia could speak; "we shall be most pleased, and then you and Miss Hastings can have a real good gossip about art."

"It's awfully kind of you. Won't you let me carry your basket, and yours?" he added, addressing Patricia.

"Thank you, no," she replied. There was just the faintest suspicion of coolness in her voice. "It is quite light, and I'm already sufficiently in your debt." She smiled as she spoke; but Wroxham knew that "things" were still rankling a little—did women ever forget? He sought about for a pleasant subject for conversation. In London he was regarded by his friends, men and women alike, as a great acquisition to any party on account of a certain quaint simplicity of speech and manner. He was always just himself, never posed, never pretended to be anything but what he was, never acted a part, and was never shy, because he was entirely unself-conscious. But before this girl, for some inexplicable reason, he felt tongue-tied.

Kind Miss Ruggles, seeing his embarrassment, came to the rescue. "I must warn you," she said, "about our good friend Mr. Pennant. Do not be surprised at anything he says or does. He's quite sane, but—unusual."

"I'm not so sure about his sanity on his former and Egyptian incarnation," said Patricia.

Miss Ruggles laughed. "Well, put it that he's peculiar on that point. He's Welsh, you know, Mr. Wroxham; a poet by nature, emotional, excitable, with the burning, ardent spirit of a Celt who would remove mountains, found a new religion, or cook a herring for his supper all with the same degree of energy. He believes he has lived before; nothing shakes him in that. He will tell you exactly what he used to do in his former life——"

"And his most absorbing interest in this is his dog Hoaxe, also in his second incarnation," Patricia joined in.

"How very remarkable," said Wroxham. "I heard you refer to it yesterday."

They were now passing the scarecrow, and Patricia was interested to find it was no longer suspended from the cork-tree and gently and rhythmically revolving in every passing breeze, but was leaning over a low, grey, stone wall which guarded a water-tank, head downwards, as though consumed with thirst and vainly endeavouring to reach the water to drink—a pathetic and moving figure of woe. She called Wroxham's attention to its elegant attire and Homburg hat.

"Don't you feel a scarecrow should always wear a top hat?" she demanded gaily. "A top hat is what our scarecrows wear in England; a Homburg seems wrong and out of place."

Wroxham hadn't considered the subject, but brought his immediate and earnest attention to bear upon it.

"Is it not that in England you are accustomed to

them in top hats because England is the land of top hats? In France a soft hat is the prevailing fashion, therefore scarecrows in Homburgs!"

Patricia agreed that the deduction was a fair and reasonable one. She next drew his attention to the old couple's little plot of land they were passing, and the delightful red stone water-jars in front of their tumble-down cottage. To Wroxham, the Ridge and all it contained took on a new aspect through her eyes. Unexpected treasures revealed themselves; shy violets peeped from the grass at their feet; anemones, a few as yet with half-opened, drooping buds, gave promise of the glory of scarlet that was to spread a flaming, shimmering mantle among the grey-green shadows of the olives; wild thyme, deliciously fragrant after a shower of rain in the night, rubbed shoulders with small, low-growing, yellow broom and rosemary; and the pendant oranges and lemons flashed like spheres of gold amongst the prevailing green. Away to the right and left the mountains towered, clear-cut as cameos, in the crystalline atmosphere, and men dotted amongst the vines on the lower slopes resembled busy ants at work.

"It is really very beautiful," said Wroxham; but he was looking at Patricia, and wishing she would not tilt her sunshade so much over her face.

"Haven't you been along here before?" she asked.

"Oh, yes; often."

"But you spoke in a voice of surprise."

"I *am* surprised."

"The weather was, perhaps, not fine on your previous visits?" she hazarded.

"It was very fine," he replied absently.

Miss Ruggles, beneath the brim of a large mushroom hat, smiled to herself. She had scented a romance, perhaps remote, but still a romance, when these two—to her—young people had stood on the promenade yesterday in such combative fashion; now it seemed a little less remote. Miss Ruggles, in spite of her practical manner and plain, direct method of speech, adored a romance. She had missed one herself: a lover, husband, home, children—all the gifts which really make life most worth living; and sometimes in the silent watches of the night her brave lips quivered and her kind eyes smarted with unshed tears at her loneliness; but she had kept sufficiently large and sweet-natured to be able to enjoy and sympathise with the romances of her friends.

"We go down here," she said, turning sharply from the path, which had been more or less level and easy to negotiate, into a narrow, precipitous and stony track, down one side of which trickled a clear little limpid stream of water. Banks rose sharply on either side, thick with lush, close-growing grass and innumerable tiny ferns. Beyond, and just showing above the banks, were groves of oranges and lemons and blossoming fruit trees.

Mr. Pennant was found waiting for them at the first bend. He was seated on a stone and was earnestly engaged in washing the feet of the Hoaxe in the little

rivulet, which attracted the Hoaxe, judging by the bored expression on his speaking countenance, merely found officious. His paws were neither sore nor tired. It would have afforded him much greater pleasure and gratification had he been permitted to nose about the wet, delicious banks in search of live and interesting vermin whilst waiting for the rest of the party. Wroxham noticed that his own easel was standing in a pool of water, and his sketching umbrella rested against a wet, slimy stone.

"Here you are at last," cried Mr. Pennant, wiping his hands on his handkerchief. "The clearing where I propose we shall picnic and the water-wheel are just below. I thought you might take the wrong turning; ladies always do if they can." He got up and hurried on, covering his flannel suit, not too clean when he started, with green slime from Wroxham's umbrella.

"Now what do you think of that? Lovely, ain't it?"

A little grassy level clearing lay before them, covered with daisies and buttercups and intersewn with tiny blue merry-eyed speedwell. A place of brightness and light and sunshine, warm and sweet-scented. Fairies might have been at work levelling the sward for their games and fairy rings, and trimming and garnishing it with flowers that gave forth intoxicating scents of spring. And perhaps the fairies, with an eye to beauty, had selected this spot in which to while away the golden hours, because of its close proximity to an ancient water-wheel of subdued and lovely colouring; a water-wheel, motionless, standing not sadly, as one whose day

was over, but with the serene dignity of one who has done its work in the world (for once it had been the moving spirit of an olive press), and was not content to rest after its labours. Against its mossy sides the rivulet flung itself in teasing, sparkling drops, and then, spying an outlet for its exuberance, went laughing helter-skelter down the hill to the valley below. Some pear-trees, already in full bloom in the enfolding warmth of this sheltered corner, scattered white, dainty petals across the grass. In truth, it was an enchanted place.

They all expressed their delight, and Mr. Pennant was frankly complacent.

"The Hoaxe and I often come here." He sat down, and, removing a soiled Panama hat two sizes too large for his head, ran his fingers through his hair, causing it to stand up on end in amazing fashion, being coarse and stiff in texture. "While you people waste your time at that infernal Monte Carlo the Scallywag and I come here and——"

"Commune with those who have gone on before?" suggested Miss Ruggles, while beginning to unpack the luncheon basket.

For a moment Mr. Pennant frowned; then recovering himself, for he had a greater regard for Miss Ruggles than he had for any other woman, he replied: "Well, perhaps . . . at any rate, the Hoaxe does, for he likes peaceful surroundings far away from the haunts of men; and sometimes he tells me things—don't you, you little thing, you little evil one?"

"What sort of things does he tell you?" Wroxham

put the question lazily, for he was so absorbed in watching Patricia kneeling in her pretty white gown amongst the daisies, with white pear-blossom drifting over her head whilst she laid out glasses and plates and knives and forks, that he had but half an ear for Mr. Pennant, though the man, he was forced to admit to himself, attracted and interested him.

Mr. Pennant's reply through the medium of his dog was distinctly astonishing.

"We don't know this gentleman well enough yet to tell him, do we? He might be sceptical, and that would annoy us; he might laugh in our faces, and that would anger us. Into our confidence we only take the chosen few—the understanding and sympathetic people of this world—human beings with more soul than body and more spirit than soul, who themselves have touched the fringe of the beyond, even if they've never actually crossed the border and got into communication with those on the other side, but who believe and know that there are more things in Heaven and earth, et cetera. People, in short, who are intelligent and open-minded and capable of soaring away in a fine and frenzied flight to the mountain tops, leaving the buffers, buffoons, idiots and pigs grovelling and wallowing in their stupidity in the valley below."

"Dear me!" said Wroxham involuntarily. "I—I hope I shall not come under the last category."

"Time will show," said Mr. Pennant.

Wroxham felt irritated. This Welshman could be as eccentric as he pleased, but he could not be permitted

to be rude. He started to reply, but happening to glance at Miss Ruggles, he encountered an amused as well as a pleading expression in her eyes—an expression that seemed to say: “Don’t get angry, be patient; the man doesn’t mean to be impertinent; he’s quite nice and decent at heart, and really interesting and amusing if you’ll tactfully encourage him to talk.”

So Wroxham, swallowing his annoyance, encouraged him.

“Do you come across—er—many buffoons and pigs wallowing in the valleys?” he inquired politely.

“Heaps,” said Mr. Pennant, with conviction. “Most of ’em are at the ‘Bella Vista.’ There’s a Mrs. Twitter, an obese woman, with no thought beyond her stomach, and obsessed on the subject of rabbits.”

“Does she keep them?” inquired Wroxham innocently.

“Keep ’em! Why, her sole aim and object in life is to avoid them. She imagines Pépé is everlastingly palming ’em off on to her in the guise of chicken. She’s mad on the subject; it occupies the whole of her thoughts. Then there’s a woman, a Mrs. Snape, with no mind beyond her clothes. She talks and thinks and dreams of them, and every time you pass her you catch ‘shot silks, and veiled blouses, and the new panniers and hobble skirts’ full in the face, like a blast of something hot and poisonous. She’s over fifty, too, with a face like a piece of papyrus unearthed from the tomb of a mummy, and a figure resembling an attenuated drum-stick.”

"Dear me!" said Wroxham.

"And the men are worse than the women—there's a golfing man. God! I'd sooner converse with a dozen ladies about their new crochet and knitting patterns than be left an instant alone with that unmitigated booby; and there's a retired school inspector, who insists upon reading long extracts on the subject of education aloud to you, with no more *knowledge*, though he may be *educated*, than a rattlesnake; and a young, feeble-minded man of the name of Weeks, with a system at Monte Carlo, who murmurs all the time he is playing: 'Now *I* use my head; that's where most people go wrong, they *will* trust to chance and luck, and it never pays'; and there are, his cart-wheels being raked in by the croupiers with the rapidity of greased lightning——" Mr. Pennant paused to pass the salad-dressing to Miss Ruggles.

"And are there none of those whom we might call the 'elect' at the 'Bella Vista'?" Wroxham, undoing his own parcel of lunch provided by his hotel, was preparing to attack a tough-looking leg of a fowl, when Mr. Pennant suddenly seized it from him.

"Here, you take this," passing his own portion of chicken across. "I—I like legs."

"But I really couldn't," Wroxham protested; "it is very kind of you."

"But I really like legs, even tough beasts—don't I, Miss Ruggles? There's more on 'em. I'm not being unselfish. I hate unselfish people; they always put on such airs."

Miss Ruggles smiled, but there was a hint of sudden moisture in her eyes as she thought of the blind sister at home whom she knew Mr. Pennant looked after with untiring devotion; and *he* had not told her of the sister—it had been somebody else.

“Yes, we have two of the elect with us now. I’ve only known Miss Hastings for a week, but she’s head and shoulders above the common herd.”

“I suppose, because I’m allowing the Hoaxe to sit on my clean linen skirt, and sold you my india-rubber bath cheap?” laughed Patricia.

“Oh, you *have* sold it then?” Wroxham, we admit, *was* stupid and unguarded that day.

“Yes,” said Patricia coldly. “You heard—apparently—all our conversation. I must learn to speak in a more subdued voice.”

“And why am I singled out for your approval?” broke in Miss Ruggles hurriedly. Here were these two off again just when they were having such a very happy time. Really Patricia *was* provoking.

“Because—” Mr. Pennant stopped to consider—“although I’ve known you now for two winters, you’ve never once asked me a foolish question; and, also, because I don’t quite understand you.”

“So subtle,” sighed Miss Ruggles, with a comical expression; “that’s what all my friends complain about—Mr. Wroxham, have a tomato; there’s one going a-begging—in what respect am I difficult to understand, Mr. Pennant?”

“I’m never quite sure if you mean all you say.”

"Fancy having a doubt about it, seeing I'm a woman!"

Mr. Pennant looked at her thoughtfully. "That's just the trouble about women, you never know when you've got 'em."

"Of course you don't; otherwise you'd lose interest in them."

"I suppose that's it. Now *I* always mean what I say."

"Well, I'm sorry to hear it." Miss Ruggles was serving out lemon cheesecakes. "It's because we don't really believe that you can mean all you say that Miss Hastings and I are willing to be your friends *pro tem.*, and have come out picnicking with you to-day."

"That's a nasty jar," said Mr. Pennant. "I thought I had always been quite polite to you. I know I have tried so hard to be on my best behaviour that it's almost hurt me. What have I said or done?"

"Well, the other night, when you were telling us about your visit to Egypt last year, you——"

"I know. I was sorry afterwards. But you looked so sceptical, it hurt me."

"We were sceptical."

Mr. Pennant nursed his knee and sighed. Then, taking his dog into his arms, he laid his cheek against its head.

"They none of them understand us, Hoaxe; they none of them believe, little one, and they all think us mad, and sometimes it—hurts."

"We certainly think you are—say, eccentric on one

point. How can we help it? Besides"—Miss Ruggles handed him a large piece of cheese and a roll to soften her words—"are we not idiots, buffoons, pigs wallowing in the slough of our own imbecility? Can you expect us, with our limitations, to believe and understand all that you tell us?"

"I never said *you* were idiots and pigs, and what in my story the other evening were you unable to believe?"

"Firstly, that you'd discovered your own mummy in a tomb two-thirds of a mile beneath the surface on the banks of the Nile; secondly, that you'd carefully removed its embalmed swathings, and wrapped yourself in them, while murmuring incantations in the hope of raising your own spirit; thirdly, that you succeeded in raising that spirit——"

"What!" This exclamation of astonishment burst from Wroxham, and he was sorry, for without a word Mr. Pennant, with the Hoaxe still in his arms, rose abruptly, scowled fiercely and walked away.

CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH A BRIEF DESCRIPTION IS GIVEN OF MR. PENNANT
IN HIS FORMER INCARNATION; AND WROXHAM MAKES A
SKETCH OF PATRICIA

“DON’T worry,” said Miss Ruggles placidly, at Wroxham’s look of consternation; “he’s often taken that way. He’ll walk it off—probably tear up to Ste. Agnèse and back and then be quite amiable.”

“But what did you mean by his handling his own mummy? Could you tell me the story? The man really interests me. He is—unique.”

“Shall we tell him?” Miss Ruggles looked at Patricia. “It’s not breaking confidence, for if *we* don’t, *he* will sooner or later.”

Wroxham liked the “sooner or later.” It sounded pleasantly intimate. It sounded as though he might be bidden to join them on another picnicking expedition; and it assuredly told him that Miss Ruggles, for one, did not conceive the possibility of their newly-formed acquaintanceship ending that day.

“Yes, do,” said Patricia; “but let’s pack up the things first and then settle ourselves comfortably.”

Miss Ruggles took up her position with her back against a small orange-tree, with a white woolly shawl rolled up into a pillow for her head. Patricia, on a rug,

reclined against an old stump of a pear-tree, and Wroxham sat where he could get the best view of Patricia.

Miss Ruggles intimated that she was tired and sleepy, her usual condition after lunch, and would Miss Hastings kindly tell Mr. Wroxham the story of Mr. Pennant's last incarnation; and if she had a nap in the middle, perhaps they would be good enough to excuse her. And, even in her drowsy condition, it struck her that Mr. Wroxham's assurance that he would was almost too warmly worded, and a little amused smile flitted across her face as she watched Patricia with downcast eyes pulling a harmless daisy to pieces. "These two were going it," she said to herself somewhat inelegantly, forgetting that it was not an hour since she had been mentally reproaching Miss Hastings for her hostility to this nice man.

"Well," said Patricia, "I'm not sure that I've got all the facts right, but Miss Ruggles must pull me up if I make a mistake. Mr. Pennant, as you will have observed, becomes a little excited when he talks; also, when very carried away a trifle incoherent, so I'm not quite sure about the number of his previous incarnations."

"Only one," said Miss Ruggles; "at least, that he is positive about."

"He had long been convinced," Patricia continued, "that he had lived before. Queer feelings overtook him when he was quite a boy, leaving him dizzy and shaken——"

"That sounds as though he had been subject to bilious attacks," interrupted Wroxham.

Patricia laughed. "You mustn't break in with irrelevant suggestions, or I shall lose the thread of my story. The knowledge that he *had* lived in a former state came to him through various mediums; but we needn't go into that, but when and where he had lived and who he had been he did not know. However, one day, about three years ago, he happened to be in the Strand, walking past a boot shop—he is most precise about the exact locality—and catching sight of a much-advertised make of boot, called the 'Lotus,' it was suddenly revealed to him, all in one blinding flash, that in his previous incarnation he had been Amen-Hotep the Fourth, King of Egypt, 'the Exalted One of the Double Plumes,' in the eighteenth dynasty. At first he was dazed at this revelation, knocked all of a heap—so much so that he was obliged to enter an 'A B C' for a pick-me-up in the shape of a glass of hot milk and a bun." Patricia paused and asked Miss Ruggles what came next.

"He took ship to Egypt," said that lady drowsily.

"Oh, yes. A week later he and the Hoaxe went to Egypt to make some investigations. He first introduced himself to Monsieur Lafayette, the great French Egyptologist, who would, we have heard from an outside source, have put him under restraint but for the timely intervention of the British Consul. Then he went down the Nile to an Arab village called . . . I've forgotten its name——"

"Tel-el-'Amana," prompted Miss Ruggles, still more drowsily.

"That's it, Tel-el-'Amana, where he had, as Amen-Hotep, built himself a new capital, and then the fun began. He lived in a tent while he pursued his investigations, and I can believe assumed most kingly airs, possibly even adopting his original titles of 'Divine Prince of Thebes,' 'King of the South and North,' 'Mighty One in His Duration of Life.'"

"Nice names," observed Wroxham, puffing lazily and happily at his pipe, and thinking what a very pleasant voice Patricia had—so clear, and her whole attitude so full of quiet humour, though her face was grave.

"Yes," said Miss Ruggles, who was almost asleep, but made one last effort; "and his wife's name was still nicer—Tatum-Khipa. Miss Hastings and I call her 'the kipper' and he gets so cross."

"And they'd seven daughters. One can't picture Mr. Pennant with seven daughters. Probably they were the cause of his early demise, for he was cut off at the age of forty-two. Well, after a long search he found his own tomb, which was most difficult of access, as it was two-thirds of a mile beneath the surface. How he made the descent he never explains, but he managed it somehow, and the Hoaxe went with him. His sarcophagus he found resting on a slab of stone, beautifully decorated with all the cunning workmanship of the Ancient Egyptians. The lid he removed without much difficulty; then taking out the mummy, he says,

he carefully unwound the swathing cloths in which it had been embalmed, and dressed himself in them——”

“That they did not fall to pieces seems rather remarkable,” observed Wroxham.

“Yes,” agreed Patricia musingly.

“What did he do next?”

“He knelt down, and after praying and murmuring incantations with great strength and feeling, accompanied by low whines from the Hoaxe, he raised the spirit of Amen-Hotep.”

“Ah!” ejaculated Wroxham, as he knocked the ash from his pipe against a stone.

“And the Hoaxe, recognising his former master, sat up and begged.”

Wroxham’s lips twitched.

“You must not laugh, because it’s very serious; and that’s all.”

Wroxham sat silent for a time. “It is a remarkable story, and I’ve enjoyed it more than I can say.” Their eyes met, and Patricia’s were brimming over with amusement.

“What do you make of him?” she asked.

Wroxham touched his forehead significantly.

“Perhaps on the one point, but no other. Indeed, he’s quite extraordinarily clever on some subjects. I believe he knows more about mediæval architecture than any man living, and as an historian he has few equals. But he’s superstitious, emotional, mystical and a crank. What do you say, Miss Ruggles——?”

But Miss Ruggles had left Mr. Pennant behind. She

was away in a land of dreams of her own, and very pleasant ones, judging from the expression she wore. And she was not sleeping lightly, fitfully, with head slipping backward and forward at a dangerous angle and falling forward on to her chest, in the horrid, invertebrate fashion of heads belonging to people who indulge in afternoon naps in an upright position, but deeply and profoundly, her resonant snores falling upon the still afternoon air with rhythmic evenness.

Gratefully Wroxham looked at her. How pleasant and comfortable was her appearance, with her head against the little woolly shawl, her whole attitude one of complete relaxation. How almost musical was her deep breathing. Wroxham refused, in his gratitude, to dub it snoring. How entirely nice and sensible it was for her, as a middle-aged lady, to indulge in an afternoon rest. If all women who were "getting on" would do likewise, well—they might be as good-tempered and jolly as Miss Ruggles.

"Don't you think," he said in a low voice, "we might now look at your sketch-book? It—it would give me so much pleasure if you would allow me to see it."

Patricia graciously intimated that he might. "Of course," she said, with modest diffidence as she picked up the book, "I am only an amateur, the same as you."

"O-h!" It was so long since Wroxham had heard himself described thus—so many years—that he could scarcely check the exclamation; but this was unobserved by Patricia, who was busy removing an elastic band from the book and turning over the pages as

though undecided which of her "efforts" to exhibit first.

"But perhaps—" looking at him with a diffident little smile—"you will be merciful to me? I was fairly kind to you, wasn't I?"

"You were indeed," he assured her with warmth.

"It was only your foreground."

"It was only my foreground."

"You will have to work at that. I think it ought to come right with care."

"I don't see why it shouldn't."

"Of course, the thing is to know how to do it. Some artists achieve something good without knowing how they have done it; it has been pure accident. Now, I don't think that is right."

"But good creative work *is* more or less an accident, isn't it?" Wroxham didn't for a moment believe this, but he wanted to hear Patricia talk.

"No, I don't think so. Or how do you find an explanation for one man's work always being good and another man's always being the reverse? George Meredith and Stevenson, for example, were not men who arrived at success by accident; they worked for it; they worked hard and they knew *how* to work. They were cunning craftsmen."

"Do you, then, think that all writers could do what Meredith and Stevenson did?"

"Certainly not. The genius must be there first; but many men fail because they don't know how to use their gifts. They don't cultivate their gardens suffi-

ciently, and they lack self-confidence. They don't try; that is the secret of so much failure—people don't *try* enough." In her earnestness Patricia slightly raised her voice, and Wroxham looked anxiously at Miss Ruggles. He did not on any account wish her to wake, he was enjoying himself so greatly.

"It is all right," said Patricia; "she is very sound asleep."

"But we might disturb her, and that would be a pity. Don't you think," his eyes embraced a log some little distance away, "we might go over there? The log looks comfortable and——" He was already holding out his hand to assist Patricia to rise, and docilely she followed him across the little clearing. He spread the rug on the ground so that the log formed a support for her back.

"Isn't that scheme charming?" he asked. "The water-wheel with that lovely pear-tree behind looks even better from here. Shall we—" he looked anxiously down at the top of her hat, for he had not sat down himself—"paint it?"

"Paint it?"

"Make a sketch of it."

"Yes, let's," cried Patricia enthusiastically.

"We could exchange notes, perhaps, and give each other some hints and help." He was already fixing up his easel and opening his camp-stool before she could change her mind. "And the light is so perfect just now. Where will you sit? That log is a little too low-down in the world. Won't you have my camp-stool?"

"But I'm only going to paint on my knee. I didn't bring an easel—" she looked enviously at Wroxham's and at his big sketching-block—"and the log is good enough for that."

"Use mine," he said eagerly, "*do*, and my block, and then you can get a much larger and more imposing picture; and, if you have no objection, I will use your sketch-book. Should you mind?"

"Mind! Why, I should be delighted, and I should feel most grand and important sitting behind a real, live easel; I never like to bring one out because passers-by seem to expect so much from people with easels. Have you noticed it?"

"I can't say that I have." Wroxham was busy removing his sketch of the monastery from the block in order to start her with a clean, fair sheet, and opening her paint-box, and fetching water in a cup from the little stream, before she could change her mind and suddenly decide she would "go home," after the vacillating manner of women. "Now," when he had placed her on the stool, "will you have the umbrella fixed up? There is not much sun here."

"No," she said, the little there was filtering through the branches of an olive-tree behind them she liked. She took off her hat and was soon absorbed in her work.

Wroxham, with a sigh of relief, dropped on to the log. He had so arranged her position that from where he sat he could get a good view of her profile without her knowing it if she would just keep on sketching. He

wanted to study her face. He had never had a fair chance before. She had always either been confronting him, with eyes flashing with temper, which unsteadied his nerves, or walking away, with her head in the air, in a huff.

It was not a strictly beautiful face, he told himself now, but it was an interesting and charming one. Suddenly an overwhelming desire seized him to make a sketch of her just as she sat with that grave look of concentration on her face, with her downcast eyes and a few tendrils of loose hair moving softly in the slight breeze, and her throat, tinted the faintest brown by the Riviera sunshine, rising slenderly from a quaint lawn Peter Pan collar.

"I will do it," he swore beneath his breath. "She may find me out and reduce me to a bit of jelly pulp, but I don't care, it—it's worth it."

Quietly he turned the leaves of her sketch-book, searching for a blank page, and at last he saw some of her "efforts." They were worse even than he had anticipated. They were so bad that they almost hurt him, and yet they filled him with an extraordinary tenderness for her. Somehow they brought her down from her lofty plane and he saw her in a new light. A girl who could paint as badly as that and not, apparently, be aware of it, could not be really formidable. Those sketches imbued her with a simplicity, a childishness almost, which filled Wroxham with courage. More than ever he felt impelled to embark upon a portrait of her.

Finding, at length, a clean sheet, he started by washing in a faintly-tinted sky—threw in a delicate suggestion of the pear-tree and water-wheel, and then began on her face and slim white-clad figure. Her pose was wellnigh perfect, and with marvellous skill he caught her absorbed, serious and yet happy expression.

Wroxham, in his pictures, was one of the greatest living exponents of "light," and later he was offered by an American millionaire a couple of hundred guineas for the little sketch, which was the very embodiment of youth and spring and sunshine, but he would never part with it. Always it hung in the same place above the mantelpiece in his studio.

He meant, when he had finished, deftly to extract the page from the book with his penknife, before he could be detected. Patricia, he could see, was good for another hour at least; Miss Ruggles was still sleeping soundly. If he worked rapidly he could finish before he was "found out." But Patricia suddenly shattered his hopes.

"How goes your sketch?" she asked, looking up. "Something's gone wrong with mine—I don't know what it is quite. I believe the water-wheel is out of perspective, but I don't suppose *you* would be able to help me."

"I don't suppose I should," he replied humbly. He did not move from his seat, which slightly annoyed Patricia.

"Still, you might have a look if it won't bore you."

"Oh, no, it won't bore me." A little unwillingly he

laid down his own precious sketch and closed the book. He crossed over to her side.

"Yes, it *is* the water-wheel." He spoke with a conviction and finality that seemed to suggest to Patricia that he would brook no argument on the subject.

"What's the matter with it?"

"It's absolutely wrong and so is the pear-tree."

"H'm!" said Patricia. She didn't feel exactly angry with him, she was more amused, but she was filled with a sudden desire to see *his* water-wheel and pear-tree.

"May I have a look at your sketch?"

"Oh—er, it's not finished."

"No, I don't suppose it is, but still, if you'll allow me—I—I might gain some hints from it." The touch of sarcasm in her voice was not lost upon him.

"But it's not worth seeing."

"I should like to be the judge of that. You have seen mine."

"Yes, but you invited me." Wroxham could have bitten his tongue out the minute the words had passed his lips, but Patricia did not give way to undue temper.

"Won't you return the compliment," she said sweetly, "and extend a similar invitation to me?"

"No," he said abruptly, "I—I can't."

Patricia looked at him curiously. This man had character without a doubt. He was strong; he was almost masterful. He liked and was interested in her she knew—when does a girl not know these things? He wanted to please her, she flattered herself, yet he denied

her this simple request in a manner little short of rude.

"Oh—very well——" she began, the colour mounting to her cheeks.

"Believe me," he interrupted earnestly, "it's not worth seeing."

"Are you so sensitive to criticism? I would let you down gently, whatever I might think of your water-wheel and pear-tree."

"I am sure you would."

"Well, then?"

"No," he said decisively.

"You seem to forget the sketch-book is mine;" her voice was icy though slightly amused.

"Oh, of course," a fact he had temporarily lost sight of.

"So I'm bound to see it."

"Not necessarily."

Patricia stared at him.

"What I mean is," he spoke hurriedly and with extreme embarrassment, "I hoped that you might permit me to extract the page before I returned the book to you."

Patricia stared at him still more. His evident desire that she should *not* see his sketch filled her with an equal determination that she would. Were men really so foolishly sensitive to the opinion of others about their work? Yet he had not appeared to mind when she had passed such a frank criticism on his sketch of the monastery in the morning. And had he not said

they might exchange notes and possibly be helpful to one another? It was not fair, not playing the game.

"No," she said; "I'm sorry. I don't want to appear churlish, but I'm afraid I can't agree to that. You see, the removal of one page might loosen some of the others. I—I value my sketch-book, though it may contain some atrocious daubs, and each page recalls to me some beautiful scene or memory." She felt mean as she made this speech, but she was determined to see his work by hook or by crook. She held out her hand for the book, but Wroxham did not, or would not, see it.

"Please," he said earnestly, almost beseechingly, "please do not say 'No.' I would extract the page in question most carefully. I would cut it away some distance from the inner margin, so that the other sheets could be in no way damaged. I am sorry to be so insistent, but——" He placed the book behind his back as he spoke.

Then Patricia lost her temper, a dangerous light flashed in her eyes and the colour swept into her cheeks. Not thus was she accustomed to being treated by men, and almost strangers at that.

"Mr. Wroxham, once and for all, I must ask you to return my book to me intact! It may seem of small moment to you, but I'm in earnest. Kindly restore my property or—I must request you to leave us."

For a fraction of a second he held his ground, then with: "I beg your pardon," placed the book in her hand, gathered up his materials, raised his hat, stumped off down the narrow path and was soon lost to view,

leaving Patricia certainly mistress of the situation, but feeling exceedingly small and ineffectual.

"I hate that man!" she cried aloud with fierce denunciation, and at this juncture Miss Ruggles woke up.

"Hallo!" The good lady stretched herself rather inelegantly. "Another of them gone!"

"Yes," said Patricia, "and you'd no right to ask him to join us. The man's a cad."

"That, indeed, he's not!" said Miss Ruggles, as she rose and shook herself straight. "If ever I knew a gentleman, he's one. It's *you* that's the trouble."

"I?"

"Yes; always prickly and on the defensive, just as though the man wanted to jump up and run away with you. You positively leap down his throat every time the poor man speaks."

Patricia was so surprised at the suddenness of this onslaught that she stood mute.

"And on the promenade *he* might have chucked you across the donkey's back the way you went for him—like a pickpocket. And then accusing him of hiding himself behind the palm-tree, just as though you had commandeered every palm-tree in Mentone for your own exclusive use. And there he takes it all as gently and meekly as a child because the fool of a man is——"

"What?" Patricia dared Miss Ruggles to finish her sentence.

"Because he's a plain fool and nothing else. What have you been doing to him now? It's no good your getting angry. I'm the one who's in a temper, and

there's not room for both of us. You've got to keep calm."

Patricia's lips twitched in spite of herself.

"He refused to allow me to see his sketch."

"Well, why shouldn't he?"

"It was in my book. I'd lent it to him in exchange for his block and easel."

Miss Ruggles nodded. "Yes, I see he's left those behind."

"So he has." Patricia regarded them vindictively.

"Cute man. He's not done with you yet."

"They'll remain there."

"They'll do nothing of the kind, for I shall remove them!"

"You must please yourself about that. I wash my hands of them."

"Go on about the sketch-book. Why did he wish to retain it?"

"Well, he didn't exactly want to do that, but he asked for permission to extract his own sketch before returning it."

"That seems a most harmless request."

"But he'd seen mine."

"Possibly at your invitation."

"I wanted to know if he could help me with it."

"And apparently he did not return the compliment."

"No, that's just it. Came down like a sledge-hammer on my water-wheel and pear-tree, and then refused to let me see his."

"Well, he was within his rights."

"But it was not playing fair. He cajoled me into sitting on this log to do some sketching—said we might exchange notes and hints about our work, and then tried to shirk his responsibilities."

"Anyway, the sketch-book is here at your feet"—in her vehemence Patricia had allowed it to fall to the ground—"and we can now look at what he has been so anxious to conceal."

But Patricia now, after the manner of women, having gained her object, took no further interest in it. Indeed, she almost spurned it with her foot. Besides, she felt it would scarcely be fair to look, deceitful even, now that Wroxham had gone away and left her a clear field. She said so, and Miss Ruggles observed: "Fiddle-de-dee! and if you're not going to satisfy your curiosity, I am." And, picking up the book, she seated herself on the log and opened it.

A smothered exclamation bursting from her, Patricia swept involuntarily to her side and stared down at the page revealed, and she too said "Oh!"

"I should just think so. Oh! and oh! and again oh! I don't wonder at his wishing to take it away. Why, the thing is beautiful, exquisite! Of course he's flattered you—but the man's a genius!"

"I don't agree with you," said Patricia coldly.

"What! that he's flattered you?"

"No, that he's a genius. His work is most immature."

"Immature!" Miss Ruggles laughed scornfully. "How long was he over this—an hour?"

"Hardly."

"And look at it, look at it, think of it, dream of it! Look at the light—doesn't the very picture dance with sunshine and spontaneity and laughter and light-heartedness and youth? Why, I feel the years slipping away from me as I gaze at it, so infectious is its sheer intoxicating *younghness*. And, oh! the fairy daintiness of it! The reality of it! You can *hear* the pear blossom alighting on the grass, and the flutter of the butterflies' white wings as they skim over the silent water-wheel—and the expression on your face——"

"I think it was great impertinence to put me in at all," broke in Patricia.

"Impertinence! Heaven help us! Impertinence for a man to be able to see a woman like that. Why, I should thank God for it. Only love could have done it. Yes, love. The man's clean off his head about you—why, the saints alone know after your churlish treatment of him, but there it is; and you call it impertinence because out of the ordinary every-day material of an ordinary every-day pretty girl—excuse me—the man is able to create a sort of Blessed Damozel——" Miss Ruggles was, with fierce gestures, extracting the page from the book with a penknife, and Patricia made no effort to stop her.

"What are you going to do with it?" she asked at length meekly, when Miss Ruggles had carefully rolled it up and put it in her basket.

"I don't know yet; possibly return it to him—the thing is valuable. And I suppose he was as humble

and pleading and apologetic as a dog that had been beaten for stealing, when he asked you to let him remove it?"

"Not at all. He was the very reverse—dominating, almost bullying."

Miss Ruggles chuckled. "And I like him for it. Possibly he committed a breach of good manners, as etiquette goes, in portraying your features without your permission; but once embarked upon it, I suppose human man's nature couldn't resist the temptation of desiring to take it away, for you don't look bad in that white thing" (this grudgingly), "and I admire him for holding his ground."

"But he didn't hold it. He——"

"No, because he was too much of a gentleman, and you traded too persistently on your sex's prerogative. What could he do? And now I'm going back." The irate lady picked up the camp-stool and easel after summarily placing Patricia's sketch against a tree, shoved the basket and rug over her arm, and, at a brisk pace, went up the path.

"May I"—Patricia was a little breathless, for she had much ado to keep up—"walk with you, or, at any rate, behind you?"

"Well, you may, but I shan't be pleasant company."

"I wonder why you are so cross with me?" Patricia had never been so meek with anybody in her life.

"Because I've no patience with you."

"But why?"

"Because you're such a fool. Here's a thoroughly

nice, interesting, decent, well-bred Englishman exhibiting unmistakable signs of being attracted by you, and all you do is to behave like a prickly, bad-mannered hedgehog; and there are one million and a half more women than men in Great Britain."

"From which I deduce your meaning is that marriage should be a girl's one aim and object in life—the beginning and end of her career?"

"Certainly," replied Miss Ruggles robustly.

An amused smile dimpled the corners of Patricia's mouth. "Shall you believe me, I wonder, if I tell you that up to now I've received ten offers of marriage?"

Miss Ruggles stopped so abruptly in the narrow path that Patricia jabbed her in the back with her parasol before she could stop herself.

"Good gracious!" she ejaculated. "Never?"

"It's the gospel truth," said Patricia solemnly.

"I wonder why?"

Patricia laughed. "That is rude," she said, "but I'm not offended. I know why, but I'm not going to tell you."

The rest of the way back to the hotel they pursued in silence, each busy with her own thoughts.

CHAPTER XIV

PATRICIA INDULGES IN A WASH-DAY

BEHOLD Patricia at the wash-tub—or, to be more exact, at the wash-hand basin—her sleeves rolled up, a large bath-towel pinned around her waist and her hands and arms immersed in soapy suds. On her face is a look of strained anxiety. She is feeling strained because she is convinced that the dye now pouring forth from a pair of black silk stockings on their being plunged into hot soap and water should have remained stationary.

“Do black silk stockings always behave thus when washed?” she asked herself. “The handkerchiefs were so easy.” Admiringly she glanced at ten ridiculous bits of lace and hemstitched lawn suspended from a piece of tape, pinned from one curtain to another across the open window, and which were fluttering merrily in the soft breeze. “And so were the gloves and the lace and the scarf; but these——” She regarded the rim of black soapsuds which encircled her arms half-way between the wrist and the elbow with no little disgust; then, after rinsing them in a jug of clean cold water, went in search of Miss Ruggles.

“Can I come in?” she demanded, tapping at that lady’s door. “Ought silk stockings, on being washed,

to shed their dye just like boiled blackberry pulp when passed through a jelly-bag?"

Miss Ruggles, who was busy polishing a pair of square-toed glacé-kid boots with a velvet pad, replied: "Certainly not."

"Well, they do. The black is literally pouring from them, and I simply daren't squeeze the poor things."

Miss Ruggles, laying down the second boot, intimated that she would come and look, whilst mentioning casually that there was a dab of black soap on Patricia's nose.

"Why, you've put them in hot water, and nearly boiling at that!" she ejaculated.

"Y-es."

"But you shouldn't; you should have used tepid, almost cold, to set the colour."

"Would they have come clean?"

"Of course, unless they were unusually dirty. I think"—sitting down on Patricia's bed—"that for a girl who *says* she is poor, you are singularly ignorant and helpless, Miss Hastings. Poor people ought to know things that are useful." There was the slightest emphasis on the "says," but Patricia ignored it, and called Miss Ruggles' attention to the handkerchiefs flopping in the window.

"A child could have washed them."

"But they are such a good colour."

"That they can't help being in this climate and sun."

Patricia sighed.

"In what respect do you regard me as being so ignorant and helpless?" She removed some books from her one chair and sat down.

"In every respect where work is concerned."

"But I've not been used——" Patricia stopped awkwardly.

"No, that is apparent, though you'd have us believe you had."

Patricia got up and went to the wash-stand. "You don't seem inclined to make any effort to help me in my present difficulty. I presume you know how to prevent but not to remedy a misfortune, which I should not designate as true capability. Now, my cousin Mary, instead of just talking, would have acted."

Miss Ruggles smiled good-humouredly, rose from the bed, emptied the basin of the hot water, refilled it with cold and plunged the stockings into it.

"They'll never be quite right again, always a bad colour, but you'll know better next time. I suppose it's because this Cousin Mary is so capable that, having allowed her to do everything for you in the way capable people insist upon, you have remained ignorant?"

"Perhaps," said Patricia lightly.

Miss Ruggles had noticed that Miss Hastings, so frank on many subjects, was singularly reticent about her home affairs.

"Not that I think you are really incapable when you put your mind to a thing. Your room now is less reminiscent of a pig-sty."

"Thanks."

"And you have ceased to leave all the drawers of your wash-stand open."

"Simply from an instinct of self-preservation. I kept barking my shins against the knobs and keys."

"And you can now fasten your own morning blouses down the back."

"I always told Nannie I could with a little practice."

"Who is Nannie?" asked Miss Ruggles with a pounce. She scented a possible lady's-maid.

"Oh," replied Patricia, with a fine carelessness, "she is my old nurse and does—various odd jobs."

"A sort of maid-of-all-work?" inquired Miss Ruggles in a pin-you-down voice.

"That's it," for there was nothing Nannie would not do from threading ribbons through Patricia's *lingerie* to skinning an eel for the cook if the cook would permit it; so Patricia felt that, in agreeing with Miss Ruggles' suggestion as to Nannie's status in her household, she was quite within the bounds of truth. But she changed the conversation. She was not going to be driven into any more corners.

"I was thinking," she said, "we might have tea out this afternoon."

"Oh, suddenly come into a fortune?" Miss Ruggles inquired, whilst she wrung out the stockings, flapped them vigorously and pinned one to each lace curtain.

"No, but I've earned two francs thirty."

"Been selling more baths or petticoats?"

Patricia laughed. "No, but you see by doing all this

washing I've earned that amount. Ten handkerchiefs at fifteen centimes each equals one-fifty. Stockings twenty centimes——"

"But those are irrevocably damaged."

"And so they might have been at a laundry. I saw a woman positively pounding some linen yesterday in the river-bed with a big stone. Then I reckon twenty for the scarf, twenty for the lace and another twenty for the gloves; that makes a total of two-thirty. We can have quite a nice tea for that, with cream—I ache all over for cream in my tea. Where shall we go?"

"But I can't let you stand me."

"Rot!" said Patricia briefly. "I'll be ready at three o'clock, and will go down by the mule-track. Thanks for your assistance. I'm now going to write letters in the garden till lunch-time, while my washing dries. So long." She hummed a gay little tune as she passed along the south corridor, down three flights of wide, shallow stairs, with their bright pink carpets, which contrasted so well with the creamy-white distempered walls and painted woodwork, through the small lounge and wide-opened doors, to the sunny terrace and gardens beyond; and several middle-aged and elderly ladies brightened as she went by. She had, quite unknown to herself, for she was not egotistic or vain by nature, brought a good little bit of happiness into their lives since she came; and they told each other they'd scarcely ever met a nicer girl than Miss Hastings.

Yes, Patricia was a success at the hotel, at any rate

with these middle-aged and elderly ladies. She was sorry for them, for their loneliness, for their infirmity; for their lack of human belongings, for their lack of human interests, for their sometime poverty, for the dulness of their lives, and a thousand and one things, such as plainness of feature, badly-matched *toupées*, mediocrity or downright ugliness of dress, ill-fitting teeth and—their knitting. To be knitting—knitting always, knitting endlessly in a garden of the South! The very thought of it almost brought the tears to Patricia's eyes. But she never showed it, never pitied, never patronised them, and in that lay the pleasure of her friendship. She really seemed to be glad to be with them, to listen to the history of their ailments, talk, hold their wool, play Patience, learn new crochet patterns from them, have tea with them, and what she seemed she was, for it was difficult for Patricia to act a part. She was genuinely interested in these lonely derelicts who drifted about the Continent unattached, unwanted by the smarter visitors, unsought, and who made such a brave effort to turn a bright, smiling face to the world. In her secret heart she *did* pity them, but never by a hint, or suggestion, or look did she show it. When she secured the most comfortable chair of an evening in the lounge for little Miss Dewdamp, almost snatching it from under Mrs. Twitter's very nose, she succeeded in making Miss Dewdamp feel that it was hers by right, being the eldest and frailest of the party, and not by favour; and when she carelessly pushed the only footstool in the drawing-room be-

neath Mrs. Brunner's rheumatically alpaca-clad feet, Mrs. Brunner forgot for the moment that she was poor and plain and wearing a most obviously-dyed black silk gown (which she was painfully convinced Mrs. Snape had discovered on the first evening of their acquaintance), and only remembered that she was the last descendant of the old and distinguished family of Brunner of Brunnermore in the county of Derbyshire, who had all possessed such fine insteps, proudly curved nostrils and a mole on the left side of their necks—there were not many families, Mrs. Brunner told herself proudly, who could boast of five generations of unbroken mole. So, naturally, the only available footstool was her prerogative and not a privilege, even if Lady Soapston, widow of a defunct Lord Mayor of Manchester, had been about to place her opulent velvet toes upon it.

With the men Patricia was not quite so popular. She was invariably polite to them, listened to their lengthy stories with a pleasant smile, but somehow they received the impression that their presence or absence was really a matter of supreme indifference to her, which was galling to their souls. For were they not, from the mere fact of being men, at a premium? Things at a premium were valuable in every walk of life. Women at the "Bella Vista," as at most Continental hotels, were not at a premium; they were not even at par, there was a veritable slump in them; and Patricia was involved in that slump. Therefore she should have been nice and ingratiating and even humble towards

the men, flattered by any attention they condescended to bestow upon her, appreciative of their every word.

And she was nothing of the kind. She was unprepared to fuss over anybody but the little lonely ladies. Frankly, she disliked Mr. Lyttleton. She got tired of his dull stories of school-inspectorship, his loud, rasping voice, by the side of which the frogs were downright musical, and his attitude of insisting upon an attentive audience for his simplest and dullest statement. She refused to be instructed upon the geological strata and formation and age of the mountains around. To her they were just the glorious Alpes Maritimes, magnificently grand, surpassingly beautiful, full of varying moods, and always satisfying to the very heart's core, and to his professional lectures she turned a deaf ear.

Mr. Weeks, too, the misguided young man with a "system," bored her beyond words. For hours he would sit at a small table in a corner of the lounge with paper and pencil, elaborating his system, his weak lower mandible rising and falling automatically as his hand moved up and down the paper, leaving behind it vast columns of figures. "Yes," he would announce to any one he could persuade to listen; "thirty-two must follow zero, it's an absolute mathematical certainty." He looked challengingly around.

"Well, I should keep the information to myself," said Patricia one day, "because if the person or company, or whoever runs the tables, got wind of it, you

would be spirited away and murdered as sure as fate."

"Murdered!" Mr. Weeks' putty face became still puttier.

"Yes. I wonder you never thought of it. A gambler with a system reduced to a mathematical certainty would break the bank in a jiffy, and the Casino at Monte Carlo would have to close. If you can do a thing once you can do it again, and the resources of the tables are not unlimited—therefore you would be seized one dark night and shot through the heart. See!"

"Yes; but there are occasions when the system *might* break down, I don't say often, but occasionally."

"Then you shouldn't talk about mathematical certainties. It's not fair to trustful, simple people. Now I myself was thinking of going with you to-morrow and risking my last coin on an *en plein*."

"Oh, do! I believe we should win. I'm sure of it. Do, Miss Hastings!"

Patricia shook her head. "And we just as conceivably might lose, then where should I be, Mr. Weeks? In Queer Street. I've nothing left to pawn or sell; I'm down to my last sovereign, and I should be compelled to blow out my brains beneath an orange-tree."

Mr. Pennant, who overheard this last observation, smiled to himself. He and Miss Ruggles were having quite pleasant little jokes about Miss Hastings' impecuniosity. Miss Ruggles, in a sudden moment of expansion, had confided to him that she did not believe in it. "She may occupy a north room at eight francs a day the same as I, but does she look it? Does she

wear a north-room aspect?" And Mr. Pennant replied that he didn't know, as he wasn't sure how north-room ladies ought to look.

"Why, like me, of course," said Miss Ruggles, "and like little Mrs. Brunner."

"Do you mean the lady who wears the alpaca boots?"

Miss Ruggles replied that she did. "And fancy your noticing them!" She was plainly amused.

"I always notice women's feet," said Mr. Pennant, reflectively; "if they're small you can't help seeing them, because the owners of them take care that you shall; if they're large you equally see them because they're difficult to conceal."

"Oh!" Surreptitiously Miss Ruggles tucked away her own square-toed boots beneath her skirts—which were not hobble.

"But if Miss Hastings isn't really poor, why should she pretend to be? It seems a dull game to play. I'm poor, and it's not a bit funny."

"I can't imagine; I've racked my brains to think of a reason. In every other respect she is quite normal. But could she wear clothes like that and be poor? Is it consistent?" Miss Ruggles was becoming quite heated.

"I've never noticed 'em," said Mr. Pennant honestly. "I'll have a look next time I see her," and as Patricia herself appeared at that moment in the entrance to the beehive where they were seated, he was able immediately to fulfil his promise.

"As expensive as peaches out of season," he murmured ambiguously (to Patricia's ears).

"What are?" she inquired.

"Blouses," he replied briefly.

Miss Ruggles was ready on the stroke of three to accompany Patricia to the Café des Palmes, and she wore an unusual air of festivity. On her head was perched her best grey hat, adorned with a five-and-elevenpenny feather, which curled up quite respectably when the weather was dry; around her neck was a grey coque-feather ruffle, inclined to moult when handled by anybody but Miss Ruggles herself, who knew its weak places, and on her hands were a pair of grey kid gloves she had treated that very morning with petrol, in the open air (Miss Ruggles took no risks of being burnt to death, so conducted her cleansing operations outside), and which, considering the short time that had elapsed since their cleansing, bore very little trace of a disagreeable smell.

"You can hold them out with the fingers extended," suggested Patricia, as they walked down the mule-track, "to let the wind pass through them; and what a grand white petticoat! Why all this gorgeousness? I don't suppose we shall meet anybody we know."

"Perhaps not; but it is such a splendid afternoon." There was a wicked little look in Miss Ruggles' eye. She knew perfectly well they *were* going to meet somebody.

"Oh, a compliment to the weather! Is that why you

wished me to wear this gown, just because it's such a splendid afternoon?"

"Not altogether. The Café des Palmes is smart, the smartest tea-shop in Mentone. The gown is the prettiest in your possession, too pretty to be hidden any longer in your trunk beneath dull folds of tissue paper."

"My cousin Mary was very much against my bringing it. She thought——" Constantly Patricia was breaking off in the middle of Cousin Mary's "thoughts." It was becoming quite a habit and greatly piqued Miss Ruggles' curiosity. She would have liked to know now why Cousin Mary wished the frock to remain at home, but Patricia's lips remained tightly closed on the subject and she talked of the view spread before them till Miss Ruggles became so tired of it that she almost longed for smoky chimneys and factories as a relief.

Presently Patricia went off to another matter. "What," she asked carelessly, "did you do with the sketch of Mr. Wroxham's?" A week had passed since the picnicking expedition, and the unexpectedness of the question flurried Miss Ruggles, for the sketch in question was rolled up in the capacious under-pocket of her white petticoat—Miss Ruggles possessed under-pockets in her white cambric as well as black moiré petticoats.

"What did you do with it?" repeated Patricia.

"Nothing."

"Where is it?"

"Well—in my pocket."

"In your pocket!" echoed Patricia. "What's it doing there?"

"Why, just nothing, of course. You don't expect a plain roll of paper to begin waltzing about in your pocket like a mechanical toy."

"That's just hedging," said Patricia. "I can't believe that your affection for me is so great that it causes you to carry about with you my picture—not against your heart even, but in a prosaic pocket. You must have had some motive in bringing it with you."

Miss Ruggles, with her head in the air, hummed a little tune.

"Don't hum," commanded Patricia, "but tell me the truth. Do you expect to meet that man to-day?"

"Yes."

"At the Café des Palmes?"

"Yes."

"Did you ask him to come?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"A couple of hours ago."

"How?"

"On the telephone."

"How did you know his address?"

"He told me a week ago where he was staying."

"Well, then, you'll meet him alone."

"I don't care," pronounced Miss Ruggles brazenly; "I shall enjoy it; I like him so much, and I don't often get a nice man to myself. If you're there he'll never look at me—and wearing my best hat too."

Patricia strangled a smile and stood and considered.

"Kindly remove your person to one side of the path," said Miss Ruggles, "I'm not anxious to tumble over this precipice, and I must be getting on or I shall be late for my appointment."

"Why are you so keen on my meeting this—creature?" asked Patricia, moving to one side and following Miss Ruggles down the path.

"I'm not in the least keen, as I've just told you. I'd be glad to enjoy his society alone."

"You'd get talked about."

"Of course we should. I forgot that, so you'd better come and act as chaperon and save the situation."

"We are literally flinging ourselves at his head. I don't know what he must think of us."

"I know the opinion he has formed of you as the result of your behaviour to him the other day."

"Indeed! How did you gain this knowledge?"

"Through the medium of the telephone."

"Oh!" observed Patricia.

"He didn't say anything very definite, because he's too much of a gentleman, but I gathered from a word he let fall here and there that he considered you bad-tempered, uncontrolled and sidey."

"And the next time you converse with him on the telephone you may mention casually that I think him bumptious, presumptuous and altogether intolerable," flashed Patricia.

"All right. Such an exchange of amenities ought to clear the air," laughed Miss Ruggles, "and here we are

at the bridge, and I suppose we must part. Where are *you* going for tea—to Gonzi's?"

"No. To the Café des Palmes," replied Patricia; and she walked through the public gardens with her chin tilted to such an angle that she narrowly escaped tripping over a child's hoop that lay in her path.

It is not wise to walk along a public thoroughfare with your eyes on the heavens, unless by chance you happen to be engaged in astronomical observations, then a merciful Providence may protect you.

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH PATRICIA AND MISS RUGGLES TAKE TEA AT THE CAFÉ DES PALMES

WROXHAM was already seated at a table in the window of the café when they arrived, and as they threaded their way across the room, through crowds of gesticulating Frenchmen and chattering Americans, he eagerly and anxiously scanned Patricia's face.

Did she know he was to be there, and, if so, what was her mood?

His own, when he had left her a week ago and flung himself headlong down the path, had been such that he had sworn definitely to himself never to see her again. But, by the time he had walked along the dusty Carrei Valley, through *les jardins publics*, along the Félix Faure, and the East bay to Garavan, all at a most terrific pace, his wrath had begun to evaporate (there's nothing like hard, physical exercise for working off temper), and after a couple of pipes and a glass of whisky and soda taken beneath a sort of thatched wigwam by the sea in front of the Garavan Casino, he had begun to make excuses for Patricia.

Perhaps, after all, she had been within her rights. Perhaps it had been beastly impertinent of him to go committing her features to paper without her permis-

sion on the very first day that he could say he had been really admitted to her friendship. And she had been so sweet at lunch, he told himself, as he stuffed the tobacco into his third pipe, and had gone to such trouble in relating to him the story of Mr. Pennant's former reign in Egypt, and had been altogether so charming and delightful as she sat on the daisy-strewn grass with her hands clasped around her knees and that humorous, mocking expression on her face as she talked of Tatum-Khipa and Amen-Hotep, not unmixed with tenderness for Mr. Pennant's vagrant eccentricities, that his very eyes, as well as his sore, aggrieved heart, softened at thought of her.

So the next day, instead of journeying on to Sicily, as in his first anger he had sworn he would, he went on an expedition to Bordighera and bought a magnificent bunch of carnations at the little market for Patricia, but which subsequently adorned the water-jug in his own room through shyness on his part to convey it to her. The following day he took the boat to San Remo, and as it turned out very wet and cold, he did not enjoy himself. The third day he went by mule to Belinda, where he made an enchanting sketch. He had no intention of obtruding himself on Patricia just yet. He must wait till her outraged feelings had had time to calm down; he was no fool, and to badger an angry woman with attentions, he had sufficient knowledge of the sex to realise, would be so much time thrown away. On the fourth day he climbed a mountain, on the fifth and sixth the smaller ascent to the "Bella Vista"; but

his luck was out and he saw nothing of Patricia. On the seventh he had just made up his mind to call on her, send in his card and face the music, when he received Miss Ruggles' telephone message.

"Thank you," he said; "I shall be delighted. I—I have always had a wish to take tea at the Café des Palmes."

Miss Ruggles tried to let him down gently. "I'm not sure," said she, "that Miss Hastings will be able to be present. I—she does not yet know that I've invited you."

"Oh, I see!" The lugubriousness of his voice as this exclamation broke from him was such that Miss Ruggles had much ado to restrain her laughter; it forcibly reminded her of the moaning of wind along a telegraph wire.

"Do you think I'd better come?" he asked, throwing all reserve and caution to the winds. "She—she was vexed with me the other day."

"I know, and without any cause, I consider," replied Miss Ruggles; "and, by the way, I want to return you your sketch; that was one of the reasons I wished to meet you this afternoon."

"Does she know? Is she permitting it?" he asked eagerly.

"I've never asked her. She let me have it, so I can do as I like with my own property. And just try to forget Miss Hastings for one moment, will you? It's not very polite to me. Will you be at the Café des Palmes at four o'clock this afternoon?"

"On the stroke," he replied fervently, and Miss Rugles rang him off.

"Does she know, or doesn't she?" he repeated nervously to himself, as they approached nearer and nearer to his table. Ought he to go and meet them? Wouldn't it be more polite? But the eyes of a stout German couple that were hungrily fastened upon the two chairs he had tilted forward in reserve against the table—the place being crammed—decided him to remain where he was.

"How do you do?" Patricia's voice was as cool as milk, and her smile as pleasant as the surface of a pond gently rippled by a soft west wind.

"How do you do?" said Wroxham, suppressing a slight start at the unexpected friendliness of this greeting. He imagined he knew a good deal about women, but——

"It was kind of you to ask us to tea to-day," continued Patricia, still more placidly. "You were—how shall I put it?—just a trifle impatient with me the other day, and I guessed you would be wanting to say you were—sorry. I have never borne you the least bit of malice; I'm not like that. I'm always ready to make friends." She smiled upon him divinely. "And tea at the Café des Palmes was such a nice sort of olive-branch to extend to us."

Wroxham, in spite of the sweetness of her smile, was not deceived by it. The look of challenge in her eyes and the tilt of her head did not escape him; and after the first shock of amazement—indeed, of admiration—

for her woman's ready wit and the audacity of her speech, he pulled himself together. Grateful, delighted as he was to see her once more—and how blank the days had been without her—he could not allow her to have it all her own way (once again his fighting qualities were to the fore)—and would she wish it? Wroxham instinctively knew that she was game enough to appreciate a foe who turned her own weapons upon her if he were in the right, even though she were worsted by them.

"It is kind of you to say so—won't you both sit down?—and it was still kinder of *you* to come. I hardly expected that great pleasure. When Miss Ruggles arranged this meeting this afternoon, I never dreamt that you would so greatly honour me, forgetting that if it takes two to make a quarrel, it also takes two to make it up again when—both have been in the wrong."

"So you think I was in the wrong?" she asked lightly, as she seated herself.

"Yes," he said gravely.

"In what way, I wonder?"

"You might—excuse me—have been kinder and more generous. You must have gathered that I had a strong reason for wishing to retain that sketch—you have seen it, of course?"

"I have."

"And now that you have seen it, can you—can you wonder that I would have given Heaven and earth to keep it?" At the look in his eyes Patricia's own dropped. They had forgotten Miss Ruggles; they had

forgotten they were in a public café, surrounded by crowds of people of every nationality; they had forgotten that a jaded, perspiring waiter was at their elbow in readiness to receive their order; they were alone for the time being—just the two of them—Patricia, with her eyes veiled and the colour coming and going in her cheeks; Wroxham with a look of worship on his face, which he cared not if the whole world saw.

Suddenly Patricia caved in. Extending her hand impulsively, she said: "Let us be friends, Mr. Wroxham. I *was* rather piggy the other day, I admit it; please forgive me——?"

"And couldn't we have some tea?" interpolated Miss Ruggles quaintly, before Wroxham could reply. The tension relieved, they all laughed like happy children; and then, under Wroxham's guidance, plates and forks in hand, they stood in a row at the marble counter, selecting cakes of an attractiveness and fairy frothiness and indigestibility that only the French could have conceived.

The tea passed off delightfully, and, as Miss Ruggles afterwards remarked, not a single fight took place between Patricia and Wroxham. "As though we usually behaved like toreadors in a Spanish ring," Patricia replied.

Wroxham was in a blissful state of mind. In his anxiety to serve her he treated her as though she were a starving child from the slums engaged upon her first meal of the day, heaping cakes and sweets upon her with a prodigality and lavishness that encouraged the

jaded waiter to hope for a *pourboire* of unusual generosity.

Just before they had finished, Mr. Pennant appeared upon the scene and made straight for their table, the Hoaxe on a lead, as usual, walking in front sedately.

"He scented you out," said Mr. Pennant, indicating the dog. "We were passing the café when he suddenly paused and sniffed. 'What is it, you little thing, you little knowing one?' I asked. Again he stopped dead and, looking up, I saw you all seated in the window. 'This is well met!' I cried, and an elderly lady, who was passing, imagining I was addressing her, bowed; then, discovering her mistake, became flurried, dropped her bag, out of which rolled a miscellaneous collection of rubbish, her umbrella, and finally the spectacles from her nose. Of course, I had to pick all the darned things up, and the silly old thing, in trying to assist me, went and prodded me in the eye with a fierce porcupine quill in her bonnet—I don't think old ladies should be allowed to sport porcupine quills, do you, Miss Ruggles? They're not safe."

"I expect it was an osprey—and aren't you going to sit down and have some tea? You're blocking the way, and you know Mr. Wroxham."

"I do, indeed," said Mr. Pennant heartily. "How do you do, Mr. Wroxham? I'm very glad to meet you again." He had apparently forgotten that he had left Mr. Wroxham in a most abrupt and rude manner at their last encounter, and shook him warmly by the hand. Then he sat down and ordered from the waiter a muffin

—an English muffin—swimming in butter. The man, who was Swiss, understood simple words like toast and tea-cake and bread-and-butter, which these strange English were always demanding, but he'd never come across a queer-sounding thing like "muffin."

"*Un moofin, monsieur?*" ingratiatingly and tremulously.

Mr. Pennant, though small in stature, looked fierce. "I did not say 'moofin,' I asked for a plain English muffin, toasted, and mind you bring it hot and swimming in butter, and sharp—sharp, you *comprenez?*"

"*Oui, monsieur, mais le moofin il n'est pas ici!* We no keep moofins." He threw up his hands pleadingly. "The toast hot—ver good——"

"That's just what it isn't," said Miss Ruggles; "the French can no more make hot buttered toast than I can stand on my head; but have a tea-cake. They don't keep muffins, and—you're frightening the man into fits."

"All right," agreed Mr. Pennant grudgingly. "It's a God-forsaken land, nothing but disappointments. I've already received one blow this afternoon."

"Indeed?" They all looked at him commiseratingly.

"Yes," he sighed heavily. "I met Monsieur Lafayette—you know whom I mean?" he addressed Wroxham, whilst settling the Hoaxe comfortably on the tail of Miss Ruggles's best grey cashmere skirt.

"The famous French Egyptologist."

"That's the man, and he's given me a rather nasty jar. It appears I was not buried, as I had supposed,

at Tel-el-'Amana, but in the tomb of my grandfather, Amen-Hotep the Second, at Dêr-al-Baharî, about eight or ten miles from the Nile——” He had raised his voice, and an American sitting at the next table, and who was unashamedly listening, was so startled by this information that he dropped a whole chocolate *éclair* into his tea.

“But I thought you'd already found your own mummy—traced a likeness in its features to yourself,” said Patricia.

“It must have been somebody else.” Mr. Pennant was rapidly sinking into extreme gloom.

“What a disappointment for you!” Miss Ruggles was as grave as Patricia.

Mr. Pennant nodded, and fed the Hoaxe with bits of toast dipped in tea.

“But perhaps Monsieur Lafayette is mistaken,” suggested Patricia.

“No, he proved his statement conclusively. The hieroglyphic writing on the walls of the tomb where my sarcophagus rests represents people worshipping the Disk of Aten—you know I threw over the worship of the hated god Amen for Aten.” Pennant addressed Wroxham.

“Indeed?” said Wroxham politely.

“Yes, and towards the end of my reign I changed my Horus name of ‘Exalted One of the Double Plumes’ to ‘Mighty Bull, beloved of Aten.’”

The American at the next table uncontrollably spluttered at this, which was regrettable, for Mr. Pennant,

after fixing him with a fierce and baleful eye, closed up like a hedgehog.

"I've finished," he announced, "and this place is hot. Shall we get outside and leave these unmitigated fools of foreigners to stew in their own juice? They look like half-baked clams as it is——" and after this parting shot at the man at the next table, who was manifestly American, he led the way out.

"Now where shall we go?" he demanded, as they stood in the pleasant afternoon sunshine.

The ladies replied that their intention had been to return to the "Bella Vista" by the mule-track and listen to the croaking of the frogs, whilst watching the lovely lights of evening steal across the valleys and over the mountain tops.

"It's too early for frogs," he interrupted, looking at his watch. "Let's walk to Roquebrun. Have you been there yet, Mr. Wroxham? No? Well, if you're artistic and keen on quaint, old-world places, you'll be delighted. We'll walk back along the top through a wonderful old olive grove to the 'Bella Vista.' Are you all game? because we'll board this car which is coming along; it will put us down at the foot of Roquebrun." His impulsiveness swept them along and into the crowded car before they had time to consider whether they'd like it or not. There was no shilly-shallying about this little Welshman. Miss Ruggles could already visualise his tearing across hot deserts in search of the tomb of his grandfather Amen-Hotep II.

And what a walk they had! Take four healthy-

minded persons, put them down on the shores of the Mediterranean, throw in a few blossoming trees, olive and lemon groves, and the glorious flowers of the South; add some snow-crested mountains, tender, fertile valleys, sunshine and sweet scented breezes, and in that magical atmosphere they are bound to be happy.

Miss Ruggles and Mr. Pennant led the way and talked of Buddhism, Egyptian gods, the Hoaxe, Socialism, the most attractive way to cook mushrooms, the futility of the theory of eugenics, frayed trouser legs (Mr. Pennant's own were in a disreputable condition), and Aberdeen terriers—at the very sound of which the Hoaxe pricked up his ears, his master averred, owing to the extraordinary antipathy he bore to them as a class.

Patricia and Wroxham, walking leisurely behind up the steep, cobble-stoned track, which they refused to take at the fierce pace of Mr. Pennant (poor Miss Ruggles was breathless), discussed the attitude of English people when travelling.

“It is improving,” pronounced Wroxham, “but still leaves much to be desired.”

“I know,” agreed Patricia. “My Cousin Mary, when I came abroad, gave me some very excellent advice. She said: ‘Don’t be insular, stuck-up or aggressive. Don’t eye other travellers, when they enter your railway compartment, tram or boat, as though they were mongrels or thieves. Recollect that we English have a lot to live down. We were first in the field as travellers, and have become so accustomed to cornering all the sun-

rises and sunsets on the Italian lakes, and scaling the Alps, and riding round the Pyramids, that when other people come along and want to do a bit on their own account, we look down our noses and say: "Oh, well, if these trippers are going to be troublesome, *we* shall have to stay at home." "

Wroxham laughed. "There is a lot of truth in that; and have you followed her good advice?"

"I've tried, but it's been very difficult. I don't like Ger——"

"Don't say it. That's the sort of feeling that's eventually going to lead us into war with that country. Try all you can to like them—try your hardest. I do."

"And have you succeeded?"

"Not yet—Rome was not built in a day—but I go on trying. Some day I shall hope to succeed. They're really—a fine race of people." He spoke without conviction, and Patricia couldn't help laughing.

"Do you think there'll ever be war?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Well, I wish we could present our ultimatum now; we should have a good chance of laying them out."

"What makes you think so?" He had not imagined her to be politically inclined.

"Because their country is entirely depopulated," said Patricia seriously; "the whole of its male population is engaged in travelling. I have been working out statistically the foreigners represented in—say, Monte Carlo, and this is how they have panned out: no Swedes, no Norwegians, no Spanish, no Portuguese, a quarter

of a Finn, half a Dutchman, three-quarters of a Turk, one Russian, two Italians, seven English, twelve Americans and the rest Germans—at least, that is how it has sounded to me as I've stood at the tables listening. Or is it that they are so large and noisy that there seem to be more Germans knocking about? ”

“No; they really are in the majority. Germany has become a rich country; it can afford to travel now, and it enjoys, when travelling, to fling its money about. Have you ever observed that wealthy people appear to take up more room than poor ones? ”

“I can't say that I have,” said Patricia, with some acerbity. “I think the accusations and jibes and taunts that are so frequently flung at the heads of the rich by the poor are in exceedingly bad taste.”

Wroxham looked at her in surprise. “O-h!” he murmured. Was she off at a tangent again? What had he said or done now to annoy her? Did she hold a brief for the opulent ones of this world? “I did not mean all rich——” but quickly Patricia had recovered herself.

“No, of course you didn't,” she smiled; “and you are quite right—they *do* take up more room. Their coats are thicker and their furs and muffs are so gigantic, and their feathers so long and waving and immense, and their whole bearing so loud and overdressed and overfed and over-everything, that they demand and expect a lot of space. I wonder if they ever reflect upon the little narrow allotment that some day will be theirs? ”

"I'm sure they don't. That side they put from them; they only permit their fancy to dwell upon many mansions; freedom from pain; no more tears, which, when indulged in, are disfiguring to their beauty, and a reunion with old friends."

"You speak as though you considered that women were the chief offenders among the wealthy."

"I do," said Wroxham quietly. "I think the majority of moneyed women in the present day are—*anathema*. I know women in London who are not worthy of the name—not women necessarily in and of society, but women of the so-called middle-class, who spend their entire days in dressing, shopping, eating and drinking and playing bridge. I think the real bridge woman is the worst product of the twentieth century."

"And so do I," agreed Mr. Pennant, who had overheard him, turning round and waiting at the top of the hill before plunging into the narrow streets of Roquebrun. "She terrifies me into fits; reduces me to a state of frothing imbecility. When, in a voice intended to be playful and soothing, but in reality resembling a keen-edged weapon, she says, 'Hearts and weak, partner?' I long to get under the table and hide. She gives me no hint of what she wants me to be—just that cooing voice, which reminds me of a rattlesnake ready to strike. Once a small woman with jagged contours——"

"What are those?" interrupted Miss Ruggles.

"Shoulders like knife-blades, breast-bones like the

corrugated edge of a saw; nose—a sign-post touched with frost; neck—well, you know those old yellow fowls which are called ‘boilers,’ and offered at one-and-nine-pence a-piece; arms—bones in which the marrow has dried up; fingers—knotted whipcord . . . well, this good lady said to me on one occasion: ‘There was only *one* card you could have led to save the game, and you didn’t lead it.’ Talk of glaciers and icy mountains! cold shivers ran down my spine at her words.”

“And what did you say?” asked Patricia. “You will never make us believe you were frightened or at a loss for a retort.”

“I replied: ‘Madame, I am aware that you wished me to lead the five of diamonds; but I did not. I took a sudden fancy to that five of diamonds and wished to retain it in my hand as long as possible. Indeed, on principle, I never play the card I obviously should; I like to try experiments.’”

“Of course, if your only object in playing bridge is to upset time-honoured traditions, I think you should say so. I’m rather sorry for that poor lady,” said Miss Ruggles; “and now where do we go? I should like to explore that dark, straggling, picturesque street, which possibly smells of drains and garlic, but looks pregnant with romance.”

“And so you shall. It gives on to a nice open square, containing the village schools and an *auberge*, where I propose to stand you some coffee. *Allons!*”

The coffee was good—extra good—taken outside the little café, and they must have sat for an hour watching

the sun slip behind the sea and the lights twinkle forth in the few cottages and houses dotted up the mountain sides before Miss Ruggles made a move.

"It must be *allons* again," said she, "or we shall be late." She got up briskly.

"But we have not explored the castle or the old streets. We could do them in ten minutes," said Mr. Pennant.

"That is an American way of sight-seeing, and I do not approve of it. I like to do my castles thoroughly, down to the very dust in the dungeons. Come, Miss Hastings."

"Need we go?" Patricia lazily rose from her seat. "It is so pleasant here, and the Hoaxe does not wish to move." He had been curled up on her knee. "As soon as we English are really happy and comfortable anywhere, we spoil it all by tearing off to something else."

Miss Ruggles smiled to herself—it was a whimsical little smile and full of tenderness. Her thoughts flew back through the years to a spring evening as beautiful as this when she also had not wanted to "go home."

And now Wroxham had joined in. "I quite agree with Miss Hastings, and it is generally a meal—dinner, lunch—to which we tear, and which we wouldn't miss for the most beautiful sight in the world. Now this evening is——"

"A poem," suggested Mr. Pennant; "but the trouble is we can't subsist on poems."

"And we catch cold. I have no extra wrap." Miss

Ruggles gave a little shiver. "I don't want to appear brutal and unfeeling, but, at the moment, I feel strangely drawn towards one of M'sieur Pépé's delicious omelettes."

"We don't have them at night," said Patricia, "and the moon is rising."

"So it is." Wroxham was rapturously surprised, as a man might have been who had never before encountered a moon.

"Shall we try and get something to eat here?" suggested Mr. Pennant. "They might fix us up an omelette—the French are so clever that way."

"Yes, let's." Wroxham and Patricia spoke together.

"An omelette alone does not sound very sustaining——" but Miss Ruggles was not permitted to finish her sentence. According to Wroxham and Patricia an omelette eaten by the light of the moon—and washed down by the *vin du pays*—was the most sustaining thing in the world . . . and they might have some cheese and fruit. . . . And with the view that was spread before them—the shadowy mountains, and the lights of the Casino at Monte Carlo shining like jewels, and the silvery flecks of moonlight on the quiet sea, and the sound of the crickets and frogs——

"Oh, don't go on," entreated Miss Ruggles; "let's see first if we can raise a meal at this place. You go, Mr. Pennant—you're the best at French; no, you're not. I recollect now you're very bad; you didn't know the French for 'muffin.' You come with me, Mr. Wroxham; you seem to be fluent at the language, and can

help me out in difficult places." But they drew a blank. The establishment could yield neither omelettes, cheese nor fruit—nothing, in fact, but coffee, syrups and *vin du pays*, which even Patricia and Wroxham were forced to admit were not sustaining.

So, reluctantly, they proceeded homewards, walking as before—Miss Ruggles and Mr. Pennant in front, Patricia and Wroxham behind.

The olive grove through which they passed was full of mysterious shapes and shadows. The trees were ancient and of gigantic growth; their gnarled roots made walking difficult in the dim half-light, and Wroxham was kept very busy in helping Patricia, or making pretence to help her, for she was as sure-footed as he. They talked but little. They seemed to have arrived at that pleasant stage in friendship when they could indulge in silences without feeling rude. Wroxham thought of Patricia, not definitely or categorically; he could not have arranged his thoughts into neat parcels, but she just occupied his entire mind from the moment they left Roquebrun till they reached the gates of the "Bella Vista." He was sensitive to her every movement, every word—almost to her thoughts. She just enthralled him—body and soul. When once she slipped on a tangle of roots and swayed against him—momentarily supporting herself against his arm—he felt she must hear the wild beating of his heart and know that he was shaking all over through her nearness. His good-bye to her was monosyllabic, almost curt; he could not trust himself to speak, dared scarcely touch

the hand she offered to him; and Patricia, as she passed from the soothing stillness of the flower-scented garden to the brilliantly-lit lounge, with its crowd of laughing and chattering people awaiting the summons of the gong to dinner, felt suddenly depressed, chilled and keenly desirous of being alone.

Her room gained, she sat by the open window, without turning on the electric light, and bent a stern and reflective eye upon the moon. "*You* are responsible for this," she muttered. "You are always demoralizing. You make ordinarily quite sensible and practical people silly and sentimental. . . . I liked the scent of his tobacco, and I'm glad he's a pipe-smoker. . . . And what a pipe! All burnt down on one side and as black—" she smiled at recollection of its blackness—"and stumpy; and he handled it as though it were the Koh-i-noor diamond. . . . I've noticed," she added presently, "that pipe-smoking men are generally nice." She fell into thought, disregarding the sound of the first gong braying through the hotel. "His voice, perhaps, is the most attractive thing about him—yes, I'm sure it is! I like the grave, thoughtful way he searches round for the exact word to express what he wants to say . . . not hesitation, but a deliberateness . . . and I like, too, the earnest attention he gives to your lightest observation, not to mine alone, but to everybody's—Miss Ruggles', Mr. Pennant's—even the waiter's. . . ." Again she mused. "And though he seemed to be glad to be with me, I believe he is quite indifferent to me *really*. . . . His good-night was so chilly—almost rude,

considering—well, considering our walk through the olive grove—but, then ” (vindictively), “ that was the moon; and he never so much as hinted at the possibility of our ever meeting again, and . . . I don’t suppose we ever shall. I . . . ” With a sudden switch of the curtains she shut out the smiling, winking moon, turned on the light, washed herself vigorously—there was no time for a change—and brushed her hair. Then, standing deliberately in the centre of the room, she said slowly and emphatically: “ I shall leave Mentone. I’m getting too interested in that man, and—well, I don’t intend to get too interested. . . . Men are not worth it ” (but she knew that *he was*); and she went down to a belated dinner.

And Wroxham was swinging himself down the mule-track at imminent risk of breaking his neck and muttering: “ What a girl! What a prize of a girl! I love her; I can’t live without her, and—I don’t mean to try! ” And the moon, the same old moon, chuckled softly to itself.

CHAPTER XVI

PATRICIA DECIDES THAT MISS RUGGLES SHALL ACCOMPANY HER TO VENICE

A LETTER from Mary a few days later clinched Patricia's decision to be moving on. It was to the following effect:

“DEAREST PATRICIA,

“Enclosed you will find notes for your next month's allowance—please observe month, not week; and I hope, like the virtuous little girl who gets to the top of her class, you will feel elated at your promotion, and not abuse our confidence in you. I must confess that it has hurt me to have had to send you your money weekly, but he who has not been tried cannot be trusted. Now I find you *can* be trusted, and the way you have managed your finances has more than surpassed my wildest expectations of you. We feared, mother and I, that you would be in a debtor's prison—if such an institution exists in France—at the end of your first week. Of course, your selling so many of your effects in order to swell your exchequer has not been keeping strictly within your bargain; and to dispose of a hat to a chambermaid for five francs does not sound dignified, especially as we gather that this chambermaid is German. My advice to you was: ‘Endeavour to be

polite to Germans, but never familiar.' This girl may now be impudent to you. She has done you a favour in taking a hat off your hands—by the way, was it the hat with a green wing which I never liked and which, when worn at a certain angle, gave you the appearance of one who indulged in alcoholic habits? Because, if so, I don't think you have made a bad bargain.

"We were interested in hearing of Mr. Pennant. What an imagination the man must have! I suppose he is mad really. Is he quite safe? Mother asks this, and she hopes he does not sleep on the same floor as you, and that you lock your door at night. He might suddenly take it into his head that you were an enemy of the Egyptians and murder you. Old Admiral Gilbert was at the 'Bella Vista' when I was there, and I adored him. Have you ever seen more courtly or delightful manners? And Mrs. Gilbert was just as nice. And the man who is like the late Prince Consort, and who wears gloves in the garden, I also know. You wouldn't think it, but he is an inventor of infernal machines; his room was next to mine, the one your Miss Ruggles has (he's quite poor, being an inventor), and I used to be terrified of being blown into atoms, for he wandered about his room half the night making strange noises. I'm not at all sure that he also isn't a lunatic. I find you meet quite a number of persons who are not 'all there' when you travel.

"When are you going to move on? I never dreamt that you would be satisfied with the quiet of the 'Bella Vista' for so long. We imagine there must be some

person (possibly a man) whom you have not mentioned, and for whom you have some passing interest.

"If there is no such person, please, Patricia dear, begin to think of your next move, for we all want you back, and the sooner you continue your peregrinations the sooner you will return to the bosom of your family.

"We don't want to be selfish, but mother is convinced she is going to have another attack of neuritis in her left arm. She has all the symptoms and she never likes to have it unless you are about—I don't mean she likes it then—but it is less painful, or seems so. You are so full of suggestions for treatment, she says, none of which she has found from experience in the least helpful, but they keep her interested.

"Nannie, too, is inconsolable without you, and I've twice found her sitting in the old nursery with her apron over her head, one of your old baby shoes on her knee, the very picture of sentimental woe.

"The dogs still search for you all over the place. I saw Blinks lying with his head on one of your goloshes the other day, presumably associating it with delightful walks with his mistress along muddy lanes.

"Venice, I believe, you mention as being the goal of your travelling ambition—and Venice in April! The wistaria will be out, streaming in veritable cascades over the old walls! It's an easy journey from Mentone, once you have got across the frontier at Vintimille, that is about as difficult to negotiate as an entrance into the kingdom of Heaven; still, if you keep up a bold front and a stout heart, it *can* be done.

"So hurry up, Pat, and push on. Mother says she thinks she can hold out (her neuritis) for another month or six weeks, and that you'd better not stay at Milan *en route*, as she's heard it's a very wicked place.

"Ever yours,

"MARY.

"P.S.—Antony Elwick has come into fifty thousand pounds from a deceased uncle."

"Oh, has he?" mused Patricia, "and she keeps that to the very last. Things may happen now—any day."

She was singularly heartened by this letter. It was pleasant to know that somebody wanted her. Her spirits had been unmistakably flat during the past week. She knew the cause of her depression, though she wouldn't admit it—not for wild horses—even to herself. Wroxham had called, she had been out, and he had not called again. He evidently didn't care—was not sufficiently interested, in fact, to wish to see her again. Patricia had, up to now, only met one type of young man—the type which, owing to its numerical inferiority to women, believes itself to be always wanted by, and always welcome to, the opposite sex. The possibility of a modern man ever being shy and diffident in his relations to women had never entered her calculations.

When Wroxham had been told by the concierge that Miss Ruggles and Miss Hastings were out, his heart, through the keenness of his disappointment, had literally sunk into his boots. He had counted the days,

the hours, the minutes to the time when he felt he might reasonably call without appearing presumptuous. He had allowed himself to dwell upon a charming picture of Patricia dispensing tea to him in the shade of the bee-hive, and of afterwards suggesting that they should stroll up to the Ridge (Miss Ruggles had not appeared in the picture, she had been busy elsewhere). And—Patricia was out.

He was too shy to call again immediately. He must allow a little time to elapse before again presenting himself at the “Bella Vista,” or he might be regarded as officious and pushing. Certainly Wroxham did not understand women—well.

Patricia, with her letter in her hand, went in search of Miss Ruggles. She had definitely decided to go to Venice and at once. She found her reclining in a *chaise-longue* in the bee-hive, trying not to be rude to Mrs. Twitter, who was again on the subject of food and more than ever convinced that rabbit was served to them in the guise of chicken.

“It’s the impudent cleverness of their white sauce that does it; it would disguise a crocodile, and—get out of this! . . .” which last was not addressed to Miss Ruggles, but to a happy little lizard which was sunning itself on the top of an inverted flower-pot. “I call it simply an—an immoral sauce, it would cheat a chef or the greatest epicure in the land. Why, I myself should have believed I was eating chicken to-day but for my sharp eyes in discovering a piece of backbone on my plate——”

"But I thought chickens possessed backbones as well as rabbits!" remarked Miss Ruggles mildly. "I don't pretend to be up in the anatomy of fowls, but I'm sure they must have some sort of a backbone."

"But not the shape of this," cried Mrs. Twitter, producing from a handkerchief, a small, dried-up looking object which she handed to Miss Ruggles and Patricia for their inspection. She wore the same sort of happy, triumphant expression to be seen on the faces of naturalists on discovering the remains of rare and extinct beasts. It undoubtedly was a piece of backbone of a rabbit!

"Shall you always carry it about in your handkerchief?" inquired Patricia sweetly, which caused Mrs. Twitter to snort so loudly that the little lizard, which was again creeping tentatively towards the pleasant, warm flower-pot, leaped back in dismay.

"I've just given Monsieur P  p   a week's notice."

"Have you!" Try as they would, Miss Ruggles and Patricia were unable to suppress their gratification at this announcement, but Mrs. Twitter, who was busy wrapping up her rabbit bone and collecting her cushions from the *chaise-longue*, did not detect it.

"I am going on to Alassio and from there to the Italian Lakes. Soon it will be too late for the Riviera—that is to say, for the smart element of Society"—she looked at Miss Ruggles' ill-cut holland skirt and square-toed shoes with such evident displeasure and pain that Miss Ruggles could scarcely restrain her

laughter. "The season, the high season, is over." She finished on a trumpet note.

"Is it, indeed?" The faces of her two listeners were as innocent and interested as a child's on its hearing for the first time the thrilling story of the "Three Bears."

"Yes," snapped Mrs. Twitter, as, laden with her belongings, she steered a majestic course along the gravelled platform upon which the "bee-hive" was built, and down the flight of small wooden steps which led to the garden, "and you are evidently not accustomed to wintering abroad or you would know it."

"M'sieur P  p   is not going to receive that woman again," said Miss Ruggles when the colossal bulk of Mrs. Twitter had slowly faded out of sight and hearing, "he told me so just now. He wishes to reserve the hotel strictly for gentlefolk."

Patricia laughed as she dropped into the chair Mrs. Twitter had vacated, and taking off her wide-brimmed hat, pillowed her head on her arms.

"To think of worrying about rabbit-bones with that glorious scene at one's feet! What a sea and sky! You can scarcely distinguish where one merges into the other, which somehow makes one think of eternity. I shall be sorry to leave. I'm not like Mrs. Twitter."

"Leave?" said Miss Ruggles in dismay.

Patricia nodded. "Yes, that's what I came to tell you; I've had my marching orders. My cousin Mary suggests that I shall move on, as the sooner I finish my proposed tour the sooner I shall be home in readiness

to help Aunt John—Mary's mother—through her annual attack of neuritis."

"Are you—please don't think me impertinent for putting the question. Are you—— No, I won't . . ." Miss Ruggles went a faint pink under her pronounced sunburn.

"Go on," encouraged Patricia. "Ask me anything you like; I shan't mind." She was unprepared for what Miss Ruggles did ask.

"Well, are you dependent on this aunt and cousin to whom you so often refer, as they seem to be in a position to order you about?"

"Oh, no"—Patricia was plainly embarrassed—"at least, not in the sense you mean. But as they live with me the greater part of the year, I like to defer to their wishes when I can; they are such dears . . . such great dears. And now will you help me to plan out a route to——"

"So you have a house?"

"Of course. Did you think I—I lived in a stable?"

"You might have lived in rooms, the same as I. People who are not well off don't usually have a whole house to themselves; but, then, if your aunt and cousin share it with you, they will help with the expense; and it's in the country, too, I think you said?"

"Yes," agreed Patricia faintly.

"Houses in the country are very cheap, I believe—at least, in some parts. I have a friend who has a cottage down in—let me see—Essex, I think—an eight-roomed cottage for six pounds a year."

"Indeed?"

"Perhaps yours is a cottage?"

"No, it isn't."

"A house?"

"Well, if it isn't a cottage, it must be a house," said Patricia desperately. She was beginning to think her dear Miss Ruggles rather impertinent, forgetting that she had encouraged her to ask "anything she liked."

"Not necessarily; it might be a hall or a castle or a palace . . ." said Miss Ruggles, with a laugh.

"Of course it might," agreed Patricia, and she laughed too; and laughed as much as if Miss Ruggles had perpetrated some extraordinarily good joke, and Miss Ruggles was quite pleased.

"And now," said Patricia, "won't you help me to plan out my route to Venice?"

"To Venice! Are you going there?"

"Yes."

"To Venice!" There was a longing in Miss Ruggles' voice, as she pronounced these words, almost amounting to pain.

"Yes. Why?"

"Only that I'd give anything in the whole wide world to go with you. The mere name Venice . . . Venice—such a beautiful name—thrills me, as does the thought of a beech wood on a spring morning. I—I—why, I could never make you understand how I've longed all my life to go to Venice."

"Come with me," said Patricia warmly. "I should love to have you."

"I can't, I haven't the money, and that's a plain fact. You may wonder how I manage to come to Mentone, and why I don't go to Venice instead. I will tell you. For three winters a cousin of mine, who is in the possession of a limited income and very bad health, has been obliged to winter in the South. She is now at Nice. She can't afford to bring a maid, and she is not strong enough to undertake so long a journey alone—so she pays my fare out and back in return for my acting as her maid and courier. At Nice we part; I cannot afford to pay the prices of her hotel; moreover, I much prefer Mentone. The whole of the year I am saving and screwing to enable me to spend these two blessed months at the 'Bella Vista.' It is the only chance I ever get of seeing life and having a bit of fun. The other ten I spend in a dingy bed-sitting-room in London—dingy is the correct adjective to apply to a bed-sitting-room, especially when one wishes to excite the pity of one's friends." A comical little smile twisted Miss Ruggles' lips. "As a matter of fact, mine is a rather nice, bright bed-sitting-room. At the end of this month I must be in readiness to escort my cousin back to town. So—that is why I can only dream of Venice—never see it. I'm not complaining, don't think that; and, after all, I believe many dreams are more beautiful and satisfying than realities."

Patricia averted her eyes, for she saw that Miss Ruggles' were full of tears.

"I *am* sorry," she said gently. "I did not know, or

I would not have put you to the pain of an explanation."

"There is no pain in telling *you*, and I'm not ashamed of my poverty when I'm with people who understand. You have to practise little economies yourself, so you know all about them. At first, when you are young, they are almost amusing; afterwards they become, if not exactly sordid, a little tiring, and one would not feel them so much if one had always been poor. Up to the age of twenty-seven my home was a luxurious one. Then my father's health failed; he contracted some bad debts—his business was in steel, and it began to dwindle. Finally, he sold it to a cousin for about a third of what it was worth and invested the proceeds, on which we eked out a bare existence. A year later he died. Afterwards some of the investments went wrong and my mother and I scarcely had enough to eat at times. Then she died. My money now is invested in India four-per-cents., and the cousin who bought my father's business, and who lives at Hampstead, occasionally asks me to his house. He is a rich man; the business has flourished, and I know he thinks he 'did' my father. You will wonder why I haven't tried to earn a little money to increase my income, and I ask you what could I do? I was not trained to anything. I am neither highly educated, musical, nor accomplished in any sense of the word. It would resolve itself into my acting as lady-help to some woman very little better off than myself, who would probably work me to death, though she mightn't want to, but because

she couldn't help it. I prefer my independence. Don't think I pity myself, for I'm not like that. I'm really pretty contented in my little bed-sitting-room, which is cosy and comfortable. I have splendid health, one of the greatest gifts life has to offer. I love books. I immensely enjoy a penny ride on one of the motor-buses, which afford you more thrills and excitement in the space of ten minutes than a humdrum carriage would in a lifetime. I've quite a nice cheerful landlady, who is singularly immune from relations suffering from bad legs—I once had a landlady who had three down all at once—a niece through overwork in service, an aunt from over-washing in her own home—she took it in—and a male cousin, a gardener, who suffered from rheumatics cruel—and I've plenty of kind friends. And now let's go for a walk along the Ridge. I'm tired of talking of myself, and I suddenly long to see the scarecrow and the dear old couple working in their cabbage-patch. They always do me good, and—I shan't have you much longer for walks. I shall miss you. Dear me! what a lengthy speech I've made!"

They felt the heat of the sun as they ascended the last steep bit of the mule-track; but the Ridge gained, a delicious breeze, fragrant and cool, fanned their cheeks as they walked beneath the shade of the pines and olives. The almond-blossom was over, so was the mimosa, but one or two peach-trees and the ever-flowering rosemary and broom made bright patches of colour on either side of the sandy path. Butterflies skimmed through the dancing sunshine, alighting now and again

on clumps of borage, which grew freely in the garden of the prosperous man who sang. The vines were in full leaf, and clusters of tiny grapes could be distinguished against their dark twisted branches.

The scarecrow still leaned in dejected attitude over the wall. His Homburg hat was, perhaps, a trifle more to one side; his legs dangled a little more aimlessly and pathetically. As Patricia passed her thoughts flew to Wroxham. In a week perhaps she would be gone. Would she ever meet him again? Would he ever try to seek her out? If he didn't, she would know that he did not care, that he had only taken a passing interest in her. Perhaps it was as well that she should be leaving before *she* began to care too much.

She was quiet during the walk, and Miss Ruggles made no effort to rouse her. They were both a little depressed.

They saw nothing of the old couple, and their cottage and garden wore a lonely aspect without their bright cheeriness. Even the water-jars were empty and melancholy-looking, and one was cracked.

"And the silver cord shall be loosed and the golden bowl be broken," murmured Miss Ruggles. "And how cool and beautiful the little lemon grove looks, with its carpet of violets! Have you ever discovered if it belongs to the old couple?"

"Yes, it does; so I feel happier about them. They could not have lived on the proceeds of their few olive- and fruit-trees, a handful of globe artichokes, prickly pears and lettuces. It would have been impossible."

"It is extraordinary, though, what the French peasantry can live on and smile through it all. Why, here they are; they have been collecting firewood."

It was difficult to distinguish which was firewood and which was man and woman, so laden were they with a miscellaneous collection of dry faggots, fir-cones, bracken and heather. They unhitched their burdens, and, after straightening up their stiff, old backs, chatted to Miss Ruggles and Patricia with all the charm and ease of manner which characterises the French right through, from the highest to the lowliest in the land.

"We were wondering whether we could buy some lemons from you when you came up," said Patricia. That she was glibly telling an untruth never so much as crossed her mind. "Could we? The weather is so hot. We should be so grateful. We should like a nice lot."

It must be mentioned that when Patricia talked in French, it was chiefly carried on by expressive signs and gestures, helped out by an occasional word; so when she found that the old couple had, naturally, not understood a word of the foregoing sentence, she offered them the following remarkable translation for their elucidation: "*Je voudrais des lem—I mean citrons, s'il vous plaît*" (a comprehensive wave of the arm towards the lemon grove), "*il fait sec temps—no, sèche temps*" (Hang it; I wonder what gender 'weather' is!). "*Nous sommes—la dame*" (indicates Miss Ruggles with the point of her parasol), "*et moi toujours, toujours*"

(with immense emphasis)—“thirst—I mean *avons soif, et nous désirons à boire la citronade—comprenez?*” The last with a smile so ingratiating and charming, that had the old people not understood a word, they would have perjured their souls and said they had.

Why, certainly; they would be charmed. How many lemons did mam’zelle desire?

“*Cinq douzaine*,” replied Patricia promptly, more at home now. Numbers she claimed to be her strong point in the language.

“Five dozen? How are we to carry them?” ejaculated Miss Ruggles.

“I’ll turn up my skirt,” said Patricia.

While the lemons were being gathered, they sat down on a bank, from which they caught peeps of the Carrei Valley and the mountains on the other side through a heavenly vista of blossom—apple, cherry and pear.

“Each day I love the Ridge more,” said Patricia. “It is a land of enchantment; the very ants and lizards seem to twine themselves around your heart. Think of a London slum and this!”

“And yet the dwellers in a London slum would probably find the existence of the old couple monotonous, and be unwilling to forego the excitements of the pavement.” Miss Ruggles dug neat holes with her parasol in the soft grass at their feet.

“I wonder!” said Patricia. She fell into thought, with her eyes on an unwieldy cockchafer, which kept flopping to earth with a bang which one would have imagined would have caused the creature considerable

pain. "When I go back," she continued presently, "I mean to try *really* to help the poor. I have only given in the past, not helped; there is such a difference. It is so easy to write a cheque to keep people quiet and so—selfish." She spoke unguardedly, an expression of pity and tenderness on her face, and only Miss Ruggles' look of surprise recalled her to the slip she had made. "I mean——" she said hurriedly. . . . There was a pause. She found it difficult to explain what she had meant with the detective eye of Miss Ruggles upon her. "Ah! here are the old people! *Combien, m'sieur? Quel est le prix?* "

Monsieur intimated that the lemons were two for ten centimes.

"*Non, non, pas cher, trop trop bon marché,*" cried Patricia vehemently. Miss Ruggles manfully checked her desire to laugh. "*Regardez, je vous donnerai cinq francs parceque les lem—citrons sont très—très,*" Patricia sought about for a familiar, and, at the same time, expressive adjective—"magnifique!" But at this monsieur made a strong motion of dissent; he was an honest man, and he knew that his lemons were anything but magnificent; indeed, they were very shrivelled and juiceless lemons. "*Non, non, m'sieur, n'arguez vous pas, s'il vous plaît. Voilà!*" She pushed the money into his reluctant hand, turned up her linen skirt, directed him to pour the lemons into the pouch-like bag it formed, and bade him and his wife adieu: "*Bon jour, madame, bon jour, m'sieur, et j'espère que je vous rencontraï . . . encore.*" Patricia somehow felt

that the *encore* should have preceded the verb, but she allowed it to pass; she was not oblivious to the extraordinary figure she must cut, and she wanted to get back to the hotel as quickly as possible.

"Yes, you look like a camel with the hump the wrong way round," said Miss Ruggles, in reply to her inquiry, "but your petticoat and shoes and stockings make up for it a little," she added encouragingly. She looked with no little admiration at the fine lace frills that frou-froued round Patricia's slim ankles, and at her open-work brown stockings and neat brown shoes, and wondered what they must have cost. She was certainly an enigma—this Miss Hastings who wore a priceless petticoat of a morning and sold a hat to a German chambermaid for five francs.

As they rounded the corner by the frog-pond they walked plump into Mrs. Twitter and Mrs. Snape, the over-dressed lady whose conversational powers rarely rose above the subject of clothes. They were taking a ten minutes' constitutional, much against their inclination, but in the hope of raising an appetite for lunch.

At sight of Patricia they both stopped and said "Good gracious!" They were not sorry for an excuse to pause, as their breathing was laboured, this particular bit of the mule-track being excessively steep, they told each other, whenever they made the ascent; the sun was hot, their corsets were tight, and the heels of their shoes were high. "Whatever have you got there, Miss Hastings?"

"Lemons," replied Patricia briefly.

"What for?"

"To remove sunburn." Patricia looked wicked.

"But so many!" They peeped inside her skirt.

"Yes, it takes a lot."

"How do you do it? Do tell us." Mrs. Snape, with her handkerchief, dabbed at her own bepowdered, wrinkled face. Mr. Pennant had been right, Mrs. Snape *was* rather like an ancient Egyptian mummy.

"It's a long recipe."

"But perhaps you could tell us the principal ingredients."

"Lemon-juice, sour goat's milk—and, let me see. . . ." she paused; then inspiration came: "Soda."

"Soda!" the two ladies positively shrieked.

"Yes," said Patricia, as grave as a judge, "common washing soda."

"But it's ruination to the skin."

"That is a fallacy. People think it is, so they daren't try it, but it isn't. It's splendid. It's so cleansing. It removes broken veins"—her eyes did not deliberately seek Mrs. Twitter's nose, but somehow they came to anchor there; it was such a large, expansive nose, she explained afterwards to Miss Ruggles, that it seemed to block up the scenery—"acne, pimples, wrinkles, blotches," she began to feel like the proprietress of a face-treatment and beauty establishment and warmed to her subject, "double chins, baggy pendulous cheeks, freckles, redness, and—and superfluous hairs."

"I don't believe it!" cried Mrs. Snape. She began to

entertain suspicions that Miss Hastings was "having" them.

"Then don't try it," said Patricia, sweetly. "It's faith in conjunction with the lemon-juice, goat's milk and soda that brings about the most effective results, and—I'm afraid we're keeping you. Good-bye."

"I don't like that girl," said Mrs. Twitter, when they had reached the top and were examining the view while they regained their breath.

"Nor I," agreed Mrs. Snape. "There's something dangerous about her. Such a ridiculous and almost immoral petticoat to be wearing in the morning—three frills of *real* lace." Mrs. Snape could not have spoken in more condemnatory accents had she been referring to dynamite or a north-east wind, which so dried up the skin. She raised her tight skirt farther from the dust and examined her own imitation Valenciennes lace petticoat with an eye that started out hopefully, but finished depressedly. No, it did not look like Miss Hastings'!

"And such stockings and shoes! Perfectly absurd for this sort of a place. I wonder she doesn't rick her ankles!"

"Those stockings must have cost eight and six a pair, I'm convinced of it. They were made of the finest silk," said Mrs. Snape ruminatingly.

Mrs. Twitter made no attempt to contradict this statement.

"And how she runs after that poor Mr. Pennant."

But Mrs. Twitter did not allow this to pass unchallenged. She had not forgiven Mr. Pennant for his

rudeness to her on a previous occasion about the Hoaxe and the quarantine laws. She was also, by nature, more honest than Mrs. Snape; big eaters are often conscientious. "I don't know about that; I've not noticed it myself, and Mr. Pennant is no very great catch, a small, thin Welshman with no position, and legs not too straight."

"The straightness or crookedness of the legs of a man should not enter the calculations of a girl who is penniless."

"I don't believe Miss Hastings is penniless, and if she is she has no right to look as she does."

"But she sleeps in a north room."

"Possibly from eccentricity, she's just that sort."

"It would be carrying eccentricity to the verge of madness for a person to do anything so stupid. I've seen her room—I peeped in the other day—it was not in any way prying, for her door happened to be ajar, and—well. . . ." Mrs. Snape apparently found it impossible at the moment to give a sufficiently lurid description of Patricia's room, for Mrs. Twitter, possibly with a combined idea of keeping down her corpulence by a little violent exercise and getting up an appetite for lunch, was endeavouring to hoist herself up a slippery bank to see what was on the other side—an effort little short of Herculean in a woman of her proportions, and eminently praiseworthy. She achieved it in triumph, and, on informing Mrs. Snape there was a sweet vineyard with a nice little path leading to a pine wood which she meant to traverse, Mrs. Snape was fain to follow.

She, however, stuck half-way up the bank, her hobble skirt refusing to permit her to take the stride necessary for the negotiation of so steep a place.

"Pick it up to your knees," encouraged Mrs. Twitter from her point of vantage. "You'll split it."

But Mrs. Snape refused to do anything of the kind. Her skirts raised, a pair of drumsticks would be revealed to the light of day, she was only too well aware, and after Mrs. Twitter's scathing opprobrium of Mr. Pennant's legs she preferred to keep her own concealed.

"I don't think I'll go with you. I—I'm a little tired, and I'm not fond of vineyards." She slid gently down the bank, "and I believe I can hear the gong from the 'Bella Vista.'"

"The gong!" Mrs. Twitter did not mean so precipitately to descend; she was too stout to indulge in gymnastics with impunity, but her foot slipped. . . .

"Are you hurt?" inquired Mrs. Snape.

"Not at all, thanks," replied Mrs. Twitter, checking a cry at a sharp twinge of pain in her foot. "I—I have always been noted for my activity."

That afternoon Patricia retired to a sunny west corner of the garden and, placing a chair against a great bank of purple iris, sat down and wrote the following letter, which she marked at the top "Urgent."

"MY DEAR MARY,

"Your suggestion is a good one: I will move on to Venice as soon as ever I can make my arrangements.

"I'm most keen on Miss Ruggles going with me—it has been the dream of her life to see Venice, but she can't afford it. I wish you could have seen her face when I told her I was going. It made me feel all bad inside at having so much money; I'm not a bit surprised there are Socialists in the world. If I were hungry I should loot shops and murder rich people wholesale.

"Now I want you to do something for me at once, and I want you to do this more than anything I've ever wanted in my life.

"Please enclose two ten-pound notes in a sheet of paper. Inscribe on it in *printed* letters: 'Conscience money.' These place in an envelope addressed to Miss Ruggles here (also in printed letters), and post it from Hampstead—this is the most important point—it *must* be posted from Hampstead. If you are unable to take it yourself, please send one of the men—the groom for choice, he is reliable and can keep his mouth shut. That is all, and don't fail me, Mary dear.

"For myself, send me what you consider will be sufficient for tips for eight servants. I'm dreading this part of the business (I positively adore the Boots, and he sings the most touching love songs each morning), and I know you're going to be mean. You are quite right too—it will be good for my character; it's so easy to give a handsome *pourboire* and so difficult to give a small one. Of course, too, I shall require money for my fare (second class) to Venice, and for hotels at Genoa, Milan and Verona en route—I'm going to risk Milan for a couple of days in spite of Aunt John's poor opinion of

its morals. Anything I have left over I promise not to spend and will put on one side towards my next month's allowance.

"I am delighted to hear this good news of Antony Elwick. He will now be in a position to marry. I have had a fancy for some time that he is in love. Have you any idea with whom, Mary dear? You are generally pretty sharp about such matters? He would make a delightful husband, I think (to anybody but myself).

"Tell Aunt John to endeavour to postpone her attack of neuritis to as late a date as possible, as I would like to stay away a little longer. I am glad to know I am a comfort to her at such a trying time.

"No, there is no man at the 'Bella Vista,' with the exception of the Boots, in whom I am specially interested. They are all, saving Mr. Pennant and Admiral Gilbert, very dull, very worthy, and very conservative and correct.

"Dear Nannie and Blinks, and dear all of you, accept much love from

"YOUR PATRICIA."

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH PATRICIA AND MISS RUGGLES EXECUTE A LITTLE
DANCE AND PAY A VISIT TO COOK'S OFFICE

THE foregoing letter was despatched on a Monday afternoon. Patricia reckoned to receive a reply in four or five days' time. There was no letter on the Thursday, which she had scarcely expected, but on Friday she took care to be in the near neighbourhood of Miss Ruggles when the post arrived at ten o'clock by the funicular.

Miss Ruggles was in her room washing a white crépon blouse. Miss Ruggles greatly approved of crépon blouses for abroad, for being already of a crinkly, crumply-looking material, they required no ironing.

"A good shake is all that is necessary," she said to the admiring Patricia, who sat on her trunk; whereupon, putting her words into action, she shook with such vigour that a perfect shower of water caught Patricia broadside before she could gain cover.

"It's the confined space of the room," said Miss Ruggles apologetically; "now look out, I'm going to shake again." She then pinned a sleeve of the blouse to each of the curtains, allowing the body part to flap gently in front of the open window. "What are you going to do to-day?"

"I thought of getting my ticket for Venice from Cook. I leave on Monday, you know."

"And this is Friday. I wonder whether we shall ever meet again." Miss Ruggles spoke lightly, but there was a shadow on her face.

"Of course we shall," said Patricia, giving her a sudden kiss, which surprised and touched Miss Ruggles, for Patricia was not "that sort," "and now I must go and tidy up my room and whiten a pair of shoes and wash some gloves—how busy and full one's life is here—I think I hear the funicular coming up, so the post will be in in a minute. So long."

But she did not tidy up her room—deplorable state though it was in—nor whiten her shoes, nor wash her gloves; she just sat down on her bed and listened for Henri's steps. Henri flip-flopped when he walked, owing to his feet being somewhat buniony and painful, which effectually barred him from *looking* a smart concierge, but in no way prevented his being a most excellent and faithful servant. Presently she heard him flip-flopping along the south corridor, leaving letters at the various doors. Now he stood outside hers and her heart beat expectantly.

"*Trois lettres, Mam'zelle!*" Henri knew that Patricia adored letters.

"Thank you, Henri. Any for Miss Ruggles?" she whispered. Henri's knowledge of the English language was quite considerable.

"Yes, Mees 'Astings, one letter registe—r." He passed on to Miss Ruggles' door, and Patricia again

sat down to await events, her heart beating excitedly and her ears strained to catch any sound that might issue from the next room. Her own letters remained unopened. She was too engaged in picturing Miss Ruggles breaking the seal of hers. How prompt Mary had been. Patricia wondered if she herself had posted the letter, and, if so, whether she had found the journey to Hampstead very irksome. Would Miss Ruggles ever have the slightest suspicion from whence the money came, and would she be very pleased?

Miss Ruggles herself answered the last question by positively bursting into the room—after the merest apology of a knock—waving two bank-notes in her hand.

“Miss Hastings!” she cried; her breath was coming in little gasps, her lips were quivering, her eyes were shining with unshed tears, “What do you think I have received? Oh, I can scarcely tell you; it’s too beautiful, too wonderful, too delightful! Some one—my cousin it must be, in Hampstead—has sent me twenty pounds, —twenty whole pounds for myself! Look at it, it has just come,” she held out the two crisp notes, “and this slip of paper with nothing on it but ‘Conscience money’ in printed letters. It must be from my cousin, it could be nobody else; I always knew that he thought he had cheated my father. And now—now I can go to Venice with you, if you’ll have me; and, oh, my legs are trembling with joy! Think of it, Venice, Venice!” Again she waved the notes above her head while the tears now were streaming down her cheeks; and because Patricia

felt that her own were very near the surface and she dared not trust her voice, she suddenly seized Miss Ruggles round her waist, and with a cry of: "We must dance over this," waltzed her wildly along the south corridor, up and down its entire length, backwards and forwards, faster and faster, till, attracted by the unusual noise, at least half the occupants of the bedrooms, who were getting ready to go out, stood at their doors speechless with amazement; while the Hoaxe, who had broken away from his master, his turgid blood roused for once at this unwonted sight, joined in the dance by snapping joyously at their flying skirts and heels.

At last Miss Ruggles, breathless, panting, pleaded for mercy; and after executing a sort of wild, weird war-dance as a finale, Patricia allowed her to fall prone upon a window-seat at the far end of the corridor.

"What's it all about? Come away, you little evil one!" Mr. Pennant, his coat off, a razor-strop in one hand and a razor in the other, walked towards them from his room. He had to defer his shaving till after breakfast, as the Hoaxe required so much attention in the way of brushing and combing before. "A religious dance—eh? joined the Dervishes?"

"No, a dance of sheer happiness, not of frenzy. Mr. Pennant, I'm going to Venice."

"Oh!" he sat down leisurely on the window-seat before them. "Ever been there before? Not a bad place, excepting for smells and the paper money. Where are you going to stay?"

"Where are we going to stay, Miss Hastings?"

Patricia shook her head. "I don't know. I was going to ask at Cook's, and I've been making some inquiries from the people here."

"Ask Cook!" said Mr. Pennant indignantly, "when I'm here and know Venice inside out. Do you want a cheap or swagger place?"

"Cheap," answered Miss Ruggles.

"Mind an owl or two in your bedroom, or a centipede?"

"Well, for choice——" began Patricia.

"Of course, no one hankers after them," snapped Mr. Pennant, getting up and walking about, indifferent to the fact of his being without a coat and that one side of his face was shaved and not the other; "but sensible people, people with imagination and souls, put up with a few small drawbacks if for a few francs a day they can live in what was once a fine old palace with magnificent marble floors and carved oak and stencilled ceilings——"

"Yes, but still——"

"A view of Venice with which the kingdom of Heaven could not compete," he continued firmly.

"Yes, but centipedes——"

"An orchard—picture an orchard in Venice full of blossoming peach- and apple-trees, the petals of which float away on the breeze to a lagoon bathed eternally in the most wondrous lights—the dying glory of sunset, the pearly tints of sunrise, the radiant blue serenity of noon."

"Oh!" said Patricia, and her eyes sparkled.

"The windows of the *salon*, about six of them, reaching from floor to ceiling, command a view of the Giudecca Canal and all the glorious buildings of Venice—churches, palaces, domes, minarets stand out of an evening dark and mystical against the glowing western sky—St. Mark's, the Salute—and the Salute at sunset-time! Ah, me! and you will be seeing it all for the first time, and you are young . . ." Excitedly Mr. Pennant pranced up and down the corridor with the Hoaxe meekly at his heels. "And the gondolas"—he waved his razor-strop at Miss Ruggles—"black, mysterious, romantic, slipping noiselessly through the golden waters, and the big, tawny-sailed ships coming up slowly from the sea to the canal——"

"The address?" demanded Patricia.

"Casa Ferolico, the Giudecca."

"And the price?"

"Six or seven lira a day."

"A lira being——?"

"Tenpence."

"I'll write at once," said Patricia, getting up; "we haven't very much time."

"Do you know any Italian?" asked Mr. Pennant.

"Not a word."

"H'm! Any French?"

"Two or three sentences, and so mispronounced that nobody understands them."

"Perhaps I'd better write for you. Shall I? This place is run by two dear old Italian ladies—sisters, and a daughter of the elder, Signora Vienello, who is a

widow. Casa Ferolico has been in the hands of the Ferolico family for five generations. Evil times have befallen them of late years, and the Signorina Ferolico, the unmarried sister, conceived the idea of turning the place into a *pension*, as being preferable to allowing it to pass into the hands of strangers. The widowed sister and her daughter joined her, and the three of them are about as unpractical, unmercenary and unbusinesslike as Monsieur Pépé would be if it were not for Miss Cranberry's intervention. The food is good, the cooking excellent; but the visitors make up their own bills, so to speak (and, fortunately, most of them are honest), and do pretty much as they like. The whole *ménage* is Bohemian to the last degree, but very clean, and somehow it pays. The Ferolicos invariably forget to answer letters (they are all called Ferolico; people don't seem to be able to get hold of Vienello, or retain it in their memories when got); and it is more by good luck than good management that the place is generally full. I should wire if I were you. It will be safer, and send a prepaid reply."

"I will," said Patricia, "and thank you very much."

"If you like it as much as this rascalion"—stooping, Mr. Pennant picked up the Hoaxe and fondled his head and ears—"and I did, you'll bless us every night in your prayers. When do you go?"

"Monday."

"So soon? We shall miss you, the little one and I; you've been good friends, and you're both intelligent—quite intelligent." Indeed, now he seemed to reflect

upon it, their intelligence manifestly surprised him. He returned to his room, thoughtfully examining the edge of his razor.

It is well, when you are in a foreign country, to transact your business at Cook's immediately after the luncheon hour if possible; there is then a chance of receiving attention from the busy, patient clerks within a reasonable time limit. Go there, say, at eleven o'clock in the morning, or three o'clock in the afternoon, and it will denote carelessness on your part if you omit to take with you a copy, say, of "Pickwick Papers," a bun or a ham-sandwich, not unless your staying powers are so good that you can face with equanimity the prospect of camping there for some considerable time.

Patricia and Miss Ruggles, being unaware of these facts, entered the place at the most congested hour of the afternoon, and found it fairly humming with a humanity which was representative of almost every country in Europe—hot on the track of tickets, routes and passage by steamer, as well as by rail to every conceivable place in the world. An American of the leisured and wealthy class had apparently settled down for the afternoon—with a weary, yet perfectly patient and polite clerk—to a little tour through "Yurrupe." Arms extended across the counter, as though in readiness to clutch the patient clerk if he attempted to run away, the American declaimed the fact that three days in Rome, two in Florence, one each in Siena and Perugia, and a couple in Milan and Venice would about do him.

Switzerland he polished off in twelve days, but he insisted upon a whole week in Paris (the clerk was exhibiting no signs of denying him this wish), and the same in London, deducting from the last a day for Oxford and another for Stratford-on-Avon.

A German was busy with a tour through Switzerland, and became annoyed with his clerk, who was of his own nationality, when he refused to take the responsibility of the snow melting on the high Alps in the beginning of June.

"What I want to see, and what I mean to see, in Switzerland is an avalanche," said the German, fixing a threatening eye upon the pale and pimply and anæmic clerk. "Switzerland without avalanches will be of about as much use to me as goose without cranberry sauce."

The clerk said he was sorry, but he held his ground. He would not guarantee avalanches to anybody. They depended upon the sun; the sun, as everybody knew, was the least reliable quantity in the universe. The moon now—— But the German didn't want to hear anything about the moon; what he wanted was a guaranteed avalanche. He left the office without buying a ticket for Switzerland. He was going home. Germany was a well-drilled, reliable and wholly stable country that did everything by law and order. He wondered he'd ever left it.

A nervous, stout lady was entreating another worried young man to state his opinion as to whether she would be seasick if she went to Naples via boat from Genoa;

and when, with commendable caution, he said the possibility lay in her being so if the passage were rough, she threw up her white-kid-gloved hands, of which the thumb of one had split at the seam, possibly from emotion, and utterly collapsed.

A Finn, eager-eyed and of meagre proportions, was apparently the only alert person present, for he took a ticket for a place in his own country, the name of which sounded like a tight cork being drawn from a bottle, with such celerity that when he had seized his book of coupons, and, like a slippery tape-needle, had threaded his way out through the crowds of people and vanished, the clerk remained in a dazed condition for at least two minutes by the clock.

To all this, out of their ignorance, Patricia and Miss Ruggles entered cheerfully and hopefully at a quarter past three, and at four o'clock were still standing waiting, a little broken in spirit, it is true, but a little nearer to the counter and tickets. Now it chanced that Wroxham, too, was in the office, but unperceived by them. He was seated on a couch to the left and round the corner of the door as you enter, a couch placed for the convenience and comfort of those who weary and faint by the wayside. He had not actually done this, having only just entered before Patricia and Miss Ruggles; but he had come to make inquiries about the motor expeditions from Mentone to Nice, and with an Englishman's rooted objection to asking questions of anybody if they can be avoided, he first looked round for any leaflet there might be bearing on the subject. Finding

what he wanted hanging against the wall, he sat down to study it, and it was then that Patricia's voice fell upon his ear as she entered the office; "Oh, dear! what a crowd! Shall we ever get our tickets?"

He watched them as they crossed the room and took up a position at the end of the waiting line of people. They had not seen him as they passed; now moving to the farther end of the couch, which was more or less in shadow, with his head bent low over the paper in his hand and his straw hat tilted well forward, Wroxham waited and listened. "Shall we ever get our tickets?" So she was going away. She was leaving Mentone, and—she had not told him. A great wave of depression settled down upon him. There was no need for her to have told him; but still—after their walk of the other night through the shadowy olive grove . . . their silences, which had been so intimate, somehow, and beautiful; the way she had leant against him for support when she slipped; the way her eyes had dropped—eyes which were usually so full of combativeness and pride—and the colour had swept into her cheeks, when he had been unable to keep from his own that which he felt it was too soon to put into words. In the days which had elapsed since his seeing her, a great hope had been slowly growing in Wroxham's heart—a hope built on the flimsiest of foundations, but to which he clung with all the strength of his being; a hope, a belief, that as he was interested in her, so, in a minor degree, she was becoming interested in him. . . . And now . . . Again her voice fell upon his ears, and he craned forward to

listen: "The wistaria, Mr. Pennant tells me, will be out in Venice now, and it just showers over the old walls in cascades, my Cousin Mary says. Won't it be too lovely?"

"The wistaria will be out in Venice." So it was to Venice that she was going. His heart thumped—thumped with a wild desire and longing. . . . Patricia! Venice! April! and the wistaria tumbling over the old walls in cascades! He knew it, he had seen it.

"I shall go too," he said simply and definitely, when the blood had ceased pounding in his ears.

Patiently he waited in his corner for a full three-quarters of an hour, his shoulders hunched, his head over the paper in his hand. . . . People looked at him curiously. Was he asleep, drunk, ill? He never stirred a finger, but his brain was busy. He would go to Venice, and he would go first; he would not follow her this time: she should follow him.

Again he strained his ears, his whole being tense, now their turn had come. Patricia's clear voice came across the room: two second-class tickets to Venice, and they wished to break their journey at Genoa, Milan and Verona. (So Miss Ruggles was going too.) But what day? Her voice had dropped. Wroxham began to be feverish; with all the force of his nature he willed her to speak up—but without avail. The clerk was stamping the tickets . . . now he was placing the bands around the little black books—money was passed across by Patricia; she received her change. . . . Now they

were coming out. Wroxham's head dropped again to his breast.

Then quite an unexpected bit of luck befell him. Just as Patricia reached the door she paused to place the tickets in her bag, and a little scrap of paper fell from it to the ground. She was chattering gaily to Miss Ruggles and did not see it, and they passed out into the street. The next moment it was in Wroxham's possession, and these words met his eye: "Casa Ferolico, The Giudecca, Venice."

"Ah!" said he.

He read the words three times over, carefully placed the paper in his pocketbook, and crossed the room to the counter. The people were beginning to thin down a little, but he waited till the clerk who had served Patricia, and who had been snapped up by a man with long ear-lobes, was disengaged; then, with a nonchalance worthy of a Japanese diplomat, he said: "Some friends of mine—a Miss Ruggles and Miss Hastings—have, I believe, just taken tickets from you for Venice, via Genoa, Milan and Verona, for let me see—next Tuesday——"

"Monday," replied the clerk unsuspectingly. "I happen to recollect it was Monday, sir, because the elder lady wondered if it would be a nice, quiet day on which to travel."

"Oh, yes, Monday. I hope you have been able to give them the desired information as to trains, routes, et cetera; they are not very accustomed to travelling. . . ." Miss Ruggles and Patricia would have

stared at Wroxham's assumption of familiarity with their past movements.

"I told them all they wanted to know, sir—which was not very much; if all ladies were like them we should get on a bit faster." The clerk glanced sideways at an eagle-eyed woman with panting breath, and a field-glass and a "Baedeker" in a cover slung over a slopy shoulder, from which they would keep sliding down, and who, in her impatience and eagerness to get to close quarters with *somebody* in charge, was, with a series of small spasmodic pushes, endeavouring to oust Wroxham from his position. But Wroxham held his ground and to all her assaults turned a broad, unmoved back.

"I am unable to travel with them myself," he continued pleasantly, "and I am anxious——"

"Oh, they'll be all right, sir; quite an easy route." The clerk was in no hurry to close with the eagle-eyed lady, whose mouth was already opening and shutting in readiness to fire off a string of questions as soon as ever she could gain his attention.

"I myself," continued Wroxham imperturbably, "require a ticket, first-class, for Venice on Sunday—excuse me, madame, the point of your umbrella—thank you."

"Certainly, sir; breaking your journey at——?"

"Breaking my journey nowhere."

The clerk, grateful to Wroxham for his few requirements, remarked that Venice ought to be very pleasant at this time of the year. Wroxham agreed with a cordiality almost amounting to warmth, placed the book

of tickets in his pocket, and gave way to the eager, pushful lady.

Outside in the street he stood for quite a considerable time in earnest thought. He had caught the words: "Tea, Rochers Rouge," pronounced by Miss Ruggles as they had passed out of the office door, and Patricia's voice had floated back: "Yes, it would be rather nice under one of those wigwams." Had they gone there this afternoon? because if this were so, he would straightway leave P.P.C. cards upon them at the "Bella Vista." Not for anything in the world did he now want to meet them till—he met them in Venice.

"I must risk it. It's now or never."

At a rapid pace he walked through the public gardens, straight for the mule-track leading up to the "Bella Vista," which he ascended at a speed rarely before achieved by a human being; he must run no risk of meeting them on his way back, so must waste no time.

"No, they were again out," Henri replied to his question. He seemed quite distressed to impart such news; he had taken a fancy to this nice gentleman, and little knew of Wroxham's relief and exhilaration at receiving it.

"Kindly give them these cards on their return," said Wroxham, "and good-day."

Safely he achieved the return journey to his hotel without meeting the ladies; then he went straight to his room, locked the door and sank down in an arm-chair

with a sigh of relief. He remained closeted there the whole of the following day, save when he went down for meals, painting and amusing himself as best he could. He was taking no risks of meeting Patricia. On the day after he started for Venice.

CHAPTER XVIII

EXIT PATRICIA AND MISS RUGGLES FROM THE "HÔTEL BELLA VISTA"

PATRICIA and Miss Ruggles had a great send-off from the "Bella Vista"; quite a small crowd assembled on the funicular steps and platform and in the garden immediately adjoining the little railway. Monsieur Pépé presented to each an immense bouquet of flowers, accompanied by many smiles, low bows, and flourishes of his hand to his heart, and earnest expressions of hope that they would return another year. The bouquets they found later on somewhat of an encumbrance; indeed, Patricia shamelessly abandoned hers at Vintimille, as it seriously handicapped her in the fight with "pigheaded, foreign officialdom," as she termed it. Miss Cranberry, who slightly thawed from her strictly clerical and managerial attitude towards guests on their departure, actually blinked her eyelids in endeavouring to suppress a smile on Patricia's tumbling over her own hold-all. Mr. Lyttleton, in booming, ponderous accents, offered them advice and instructions as to what they should see and what they should avoid on their travels. Milan Cathedral was only to be viewed by moonlight; then it assumed a dignity and architectural beauty denied to it by day, when it was merely a fantastic, common, wedding-cake-looking monstrosity; and

when Patricia sought advice as to their procedure if there were no moon, he said: "Don't see it at all." The little church of Santa Maria dei Miraccoli was not to be missed in Venice, nor was a particular Campo, of which Miss Ruggles and Patricia afterwards carelessly forgot the name. Mr. Weeks, agitated and spent-looking, after days of conjuring with figures on paper, informed Patricia in a husky voice that it was not a mathematical certainty, thirty-two following zero. It had not been the previous day, and two of his golden louis had been swept away by a rapacious croupier indifferent to systems. He felt he ought, after what he had said before on this subject, to tell Patricia, in case she, too, were let down, and Patricia thanked him for his kindness and consideration. Mr. Pennant, with the Hoaxe at his side, bade them mournful farewells; he was wearing a black alpaca coat, with white flannels and a straw hat. He mentioned that if the pleasure was not to be his of meeting them again in this world, it certainly would be in another incarnation—that the Hoaxe had had this revealed to him, and that Patricia was to be a man holding an important government appointment—he fancied a First Sea Lord—and Miss Ruggles an Indian princess, which information considerably cheered them. The little ladies crowded around Patricia, showering upon her many kind words, and offering much advice relative to drains and smells and cold winds and sudden changes in weather which might be encountered in Venice; in addition, one gave her a new crochet pattern as a parting present, and another a thing made of

holland shaped like a cracker, for holding hat-pins, and tied up at the ends with red ribbons, from a utilitarian point of view somewhat of a failure, as Patricia subsequently discovered, considerable time being wasted in a fruitless endeavour to find the small holes into which each hat-pin was supposed to be inserted; so it joined the Eiffel Tower in Patricia's mind (metaphorically) as another encumbrance on the face of an already crowded earth, and (practically) in the bottom of her equally crowded trunk. Later, it and the Eiffel Tower were presented to Nannie, who played with them when she had nothing particular to do, and she grew quite fond of them.

At the psychological moment of departure Jacques suddenly—awkwardly, but quite determinedly—elbowed his way to the front of the little crowd, and thrust a buttonhole of stephanotis into Patricia's hand, and before she had time to express her gratitude for this tribute of his affection, he had darted up the steps and disappeared from view.

Now they were off, to an accompaniment of a chorus of farewells—*bon voyage, au revoir*, good-bye, waving handkerchiefs, and a general speed the parting guest. The little train, like a gigantic ponderous slug, moved slowly down the steep incline, and the first chapter of Patricia's peregrinations had ended.

"Well, that's over," said she, mopping her brow with the hand that was not clutching Monsieur Pépé's immense bouquet of flowers, "and I'm very tired. I'm so tired that I would like to go straight to a heaven

where the system of tipping servants was not only non-existent, but had never even been conceived. It's a pernicious system—a demoralising one (for the tipper), a heartbreaking system. The last twenty-four hours have been the most strenuous and nerve-racking of my life; I feel broken bodily and spiritually." She closed her eyes and scarcely spoke again till she reached Vintimille; (Miss Ruggles said afterwards she had been husbanding her resources).

Her language might appear exaggerated, but, for a girl, it was not unduly so. She *had* passed through a harassing time: Mary had not been liberal in the allowance she had sent for the servants' gratuities—one pound. One pound, however manipulated, could not be converted into more than twenty-five francs. Twenty-five francs amongst eight servants! It was a fearful and wearing and unnecessary strain, Patricia felt; but she had no thought of evading it by drawing upon the funds allowed for her hotel and travelling expenses. She went through it courageously, if not cheerfully.

On the night before her departure, having obtained change from Miss Cranberry at the bureau, she retired to her room and apportioned out the money into little heaps upon her bed: five francs for the *maitre d'hôtel*—that was all—and he had been so kind and attentive. In the past, in those golden days of ease and freedom from care, when she had had plenty of money at her disposal, a sovereign to a head-waiter for a mere week-end would have seemed a just and fitting reward for service rendered. And now—five francs for nearly as

many weeks! Her cheeks burnt. . . . And his name was Étienne, and his eyes were of such a beautiful brown, with little amber lights in them. . . . For a considerable time she handled the money, and did sort of little juggling tricks with it. From her right hand she passed five francs—five separate coins to her left—her left hand having become Étienne for the time being; then she tried him with a five-franc piece, and commanded him to speak out and tell her which appeared to be the handsomer tip—five francs or a five-franc piece; and when Étienne elected for the “piece,” she deemed he had judged wisely, there being a substantiality and importance about it denied to the smaller brethren of the same ilk.

From Étienne she passed on to Anna the chambermaid, and Henri, to whom she apportioned another five francs each. Next to Jacques the Boots, Henri occupied the warmest place in her heart. He was so resourceful, so kindly, so sprightly in spirit, if not about the feet, and so dependable. Patricia, in her dealings with him, was somehow always reminded of the song “Hearts of Oak,” and fine upstanding forest trees. Never had he failed to give her the soundest of advice with reference to the taking or non-taking of umbrellas on her starting out on an expedition. Never was he at a loss about winds or aspects, or setting suns, or rising moons, or the advent of mistrals, or the over-weight of letters, or the price of postage to places even so remote as Greenland. And had he not on two occasions pointed out to her the island of Corsica, rising dimly

and dream-like from a nebulous sea? And for all this he was to receive . . . Patricia, with eyes tightly closed, could scarcely frame the words . . . indeed, she refused—time enough when the dreaded moment for dispensing her gratuities arrived. Jean, the driver of the funicular, “Jean of the Smiling Face,” as he was nicknamed at the hotel, would have to be content with two francs; also Fritz, the waiter who had served her at breakfast—no, Fritz perhaps must have three; that left only four for dear Jacques, who combined the duties of both boots and porter, and one for Pierre, the bright little boy who swept stairs and passages and helped Jacques with the heavier luggage. And that was the lot.

She scarcely slept a wink that night, and when she did her dreams were troubled by visions of Anna flinging her five-franc piece into the sea a couple of miles away, and Henri depositing his in the frog-pond at the bend of the mule-track. She rose heavy-eyed and quivery about the knees.

The *maître d'hôtel* was the first to receive his *pour-boire*. Breakfast over—and her chattering teeth would scarcely meet through her brown crisp crescent—she approached him nervously, sidling up to him with a jerky, crab-like movement. “Good-morning, Étienne” (she had apparently forgotten she had already said this to him twice). “I—I am leaving to-day; good-bye. . . .” With an awkward gesture she thrust the “piece” into what she took, and correctly, to be his right hand, but which, through being full of table-

napkin and a rack of toast, failed to close over it carelessly and gracefully, as is the custom of the right hands of well-trained waiters, and with a loud clatter the coin fell on the polished floor. Then, in both stooping hurriedly to pick it up, their heads collided with such force that Patricia momentarily lost sight of him in a galaxy of stars, and how she got out of the room she was never afterwards able to say.

Her own room gained, she sat down all of a tremble and thought hard things of the *maitre d'hôtel*. "I shall never get through it!" she moaned. "Oh, if Anna *could* but die."

But Anna, never obliging at any time, arrived at that moment—hearty, well, and unusually smiling and affable—to see if she could do anything to assist Patricia, and when Patricia shook her head, she lingered about the room and picked up pins with assiduity—pins that had been there for many days, but, up to now, unperceived. At length, with the air of a criminal approaching the gallows, Patricia took the bull by the horns and proffered Anna another of her five-franc pieces whilst murmuring, (she never could say why), "Thank you, Anna."

But Anna did not echo this polite sentiment. She looked in a heavy, Teutonic way down her heavy Teutonic nose at the coin in the same way that one usually looks at beetles and made a slight siffling noise.

"It's for you, Anna," said Patricia faintly; "I leave to . . . day. *Je—vais à Venice. B-bon jour, Anna. . . . Je vais à Venice maintenant.*" She laid the coin

at which Anna was casting cold oblique looks on the washstand and fled—fled presumably to Venice minus a hat, coat or gloves. In the corridor she met Jacques—Jacques coming for her luggage. She hailed him as a friend—a sympathetic, ungrasping and understanding friend. “Dear Jacques,” she cried, (the “dear” slipped out), “I was just going to look for you, I—everything is ready. Strap the hold-all gently, Jacques—don’t pull too tightly—once it burst and—here is your *pourboire*, it’s very little, only four francs, and I wish it were more. . . . You’ve cleaned my boots so beautifully and I’ve so enjoyed your singing—I’ve never made up my mind whether I like your songs best when you are acting as Boots or Porter. There’s such a light-heartedness about ‘*Au clair de la lune, mon ami Pierrot*,’ it’s always raised my spirits; on the other hand, ‘*Voilà ce que je suis sans toi*’ is so moving and beautiful. Jacques,” her voice became tremulous, “I wish I could give your fourteen francs instead of four; but the fact is, I—I have very little money—I mean with me. You—you understand, don’t you?” She clasped and unclasped her hands.

And to say that Jacques, who vied with Henri in his knowledge of English, would literally have lain down on the floor at her request and suffered her to walk over him would be to express mildly the depth of his regard for her. Instead, his affection took a more practical form; at her bidding he fetched her coat and hat and gloves from beneath Anna’s nose, and these she put on before a mirror at the end of the passage, to the un-

bounded interest of Mrs. Snape, who never had been able to fathom how Miss Hastings arranged her veil so trim and taut. "She ties it at the back in the usual way," Mrs. Twitter—not yet departed—was the recipient of this most interesting piece of information, "and then draws the edges forward along the brim till it tightens up." Patricia's existence in the universe had been justified in the eyes of Mrs. Snape.

The rest of her "tipping" she got through somehow and scarcely caring—she was past it. She did not recover till she arrived at Vintimille. Then, on making the discovery from the large clock in the station that an hour had been snatched away from her life to straighten up European time, she revived through shock. Unconsciously she braced herself and squared her shoulders for anything that might follow. Miss Ruggles chuckled to herself as she followed her down the platform.

"A word of advice," she whispered, as they entered the *douane*, and she saw Patricia cast an indignant glance at a blue-bloused porter who jabbed her in the back with a bulging portmanteau, "try to keep your temper. It pays."

CHAPTER XIX

IN WHICH WROXHAM BECOMES A "PENSIONNAIRE"
AT "CASA FEROLICO"

FOR a brief interval we must turn our attention to Wroxham, whom we last left travelling to Venice. He made one change in his programme. He broke his journey at Verona, finding it impossible to resist renewing his acquaintance with what is admittedly the most picturesque, quaint and lovable of all the picturesque, quaint and lovable piazzas which are to be found in Italy.

He stayed at a comfortable and quite up-to-date hotel; dined at a typical Italian restaurant in a little campo, where a dignified statue of Dante mounts guard—a campo encompassed about with a bewilderingly beautiful collection of old houses, staircases and gateways; commanded that his coffee should be brought outside to him to a rough, clean-scrubbed, wooden table, and while he drank it beneath the stars set in a sky of deep indigo blue, thought of Patricia. He continued to think of Patricia throughout the smoking of four pipes and the drinking of a second cup of coffee, and he was still thinking of her as he returned to his hotel.

Looking back through the weeks, it seemed to him there had not been a waking moment when she had, from the time he had first cast eyes upon her, been

absent from his thoughts. Now he was thinking of what she had said and the way she had said it; now of what she had done and her manner of doing it; then of her looks—the way she held her head, her gallant bearing, the free, lithe movement of her body, the bright look of defiance and anger in her eyes, the sudden, tremulous softness of her mouth. He compared her face to an April day; he did not know why, but she somehow reminded him of young green leaves clean-washed and smiling in the sunshine after a smart shower of rain. Perhaps it was her freshness and aliveness. He could never conceive her *blasé*; disillusioned she might be, he said, but never the other. She would be always ready to start forth undaunted upon some quest or another, always alert, ready for anything. He wondered how she would take it to find him installed before her at her *pension*—for should “Casa Ferolico” prove not to be a *pension*, he had quite made up his mind to search the whole of Venice till he found out where she meant to stay. He had formulated his method: “Pardon me” (to the one in authority at the bureau), “but I believe two friends of mine—a Miss Ruggles and Miss Hastings—have booked rooms here for next week—Miss Ruggles and . . . oh, from the ‘Bella Vista,’ Mentone. Miss R-u-g-g-l-e-s and Miss Hastings. No? Oh, I’m sorry! Thank you, very much. I’ve made a mistake. Much obliged. Good-day.” And so on, and so on *ad infinitum*, till he had run them to earth. He felt in no way ashamed of his proposed line of action. It seemed to him a perfectly legitimate thing to do. He was in

love with Patricia, desperately in love with her; why, then, not seek her out and do everything in his power to make her love him in return? She was not the sort that would meet any man two-thirds of the way; he doubted if she would concede a third even. He must do all the running, he well knew, and he was proud to do it. She was a prize worth winning and, when won, holding. And should her imagination be touched—should she ever learn to love him, give him a tenth part of what he was ready to offer to her—why . . . he broke off. There was something wrong here. . . . Patricia was not like that, he instinctively knew; she would love or not love. There would be no tenths of herself doled out; it would be all or nothing. Her love would be splendid and fine, and she would give full measure and running over to the man of her heart. At thought of it Wroxham caught at his breath like a person who had been running hard.

He had no difficulty in finding “Casa Ferolico.” The gondolier knew it well. He’d often taken people there; it was a *pension*, and a very comfortable one at that. A long journey, but he knew short cuts; three-quarters of an hour, perhaps, as the signor’s luggage was heavy . . . he looked askance at Wroxham’s heavy Taormina trunk, full of his canvases and paints. (Wroxham meant to do a lot of sketching in the interval of waiting.)

The Giudecca Canal was wide, leading to the open sea, and a tang of salt freshness was in the air as they

crossed it, picking their way in and out of innumerable craft of every size and description.

Lights twinkled along the banks, for darkness had descended; the Church of the Redentore stood out—a grim black pile from a background of storehouses and small factories, for the Giudecca, with its wharves, is the commercial quarter of Venice. Presently the gondolier came slowly and rhythmically to a pause at some steps in front of a frowning black building, whose lower windows were barred with iron, and whose massive door was studded with large-headed, rusty nails.

“‘Casa Ferolico,’ signor.” The gondolier made to lift out Wroxham’s luggage, but Wroxham told him to stop. First he must ascertain if there were a room to be got. It might be full. He pulled vigorously at the long drop-handle of the bell, and the noise went echoing away as through vast and innumerable stone passages and courtyards. After a lengthy interval the heavy door swung back and a woman with a black shawl tied over her head, and bearing a lantern in her hand, peered round it and demanded in Italian what she could do for him. Her voice was musical and refined, and had a cheerful welcoming lilt in it. It was the Signorina Vienello, daughter of the elder of the two ladies who ran the establishment; but she was always called Signorina Ferolico, the same as her aunt. She had a bright face, with a pair of sparkling black eyes and a cloud of shiny black hair.

Wroxham replied in French, his knowledge of Italian being slight, and he was relieved to find that she under-

stood him. His primary ambition, of course, was to discover without delay if Miss Ruggles and Patricia were to be guests at "Casa Ferolico"; if they were not, neither was he; that he had settled quite clearly in his mind. So he opened without any preamble: "I learnt of your *pension* through a friend of mine—Miss Hastings"—he pronounced the name very distinctly, and made the slightest perceptible pause which the signorina immediately seized upon: "Miss Hastings! She comes here at the end of this week with another lady, friends of Mr. Pennant, the dear, peculiar gentleman with the little dog; all Mr. Pennant's friends were welcome. Would not monsieur enter while he stated his business?" She spoke volubly, . . . Outwardly calm, though inwardly tingling with excitement, Wroxham replied that his business could be summed up in one question; had she a room that she could let, because if so, he would like to engage it for an indefinite period. . . . "Why, yes, monsieur. . . . A most charming room—several charming rooms. Beppo, bring the luggage! Monsieur was most fortunate to have secured the services of Beppo, who was an excellent man, and never overcharged and was very strong . . . there were many steps at 'Casa Ferolico,' and some of the gondoliers were as thin as straws and weak as newly-hatched canaries. Would monsieur mind the step below the door? . . ." She was leading him across a large, stone-flagged courtyard opening out at the farther end, Wroxham dimly perceived, on to a garden. Turning abruptly to the right, she conducted him up a flight

of stairs of discoloured chipped marble, talking brightly and rapidly all the way, followed by the gondolier and an extraordinarily handsome boy, whom she had summoned to assist with the luggage by clapping her hands and screaming at the top of her voice: "Angelo, Angelo."

The staircase was but dimly lighted by one small paraffin lamp; but Wroxham saw there were pots of hydrangeas, fuchsias and heliotrope on the wide window ledges, and a magnificent and barbaric-coloured pair of curtains hung on either side of an oaken door to the left, which led to the kitchen. The staircase ended in a mahogany door which opened directly into an immense apartment shaped like the letter L—the *salon* and *salle à manger* in one, the *salon* being revealed on entering, the *salle à manger* round the corner.

Dinner was apparently just over, for used dessert plates, knives and forks and glasses remained upon the small separate tables, which reminded Wroxham of mushrooms scattered about a field, so vast were the proportions of the room. The visitors were, for the most part, seated round a large oval table, with two lamps in the centre, reading, sewing, writing or playing patience. They all looked up with ill-concealed interest at Wroxham as he, the signorina, the gondolier, Angelo and his luggage filed past them to a door at the extreme end of the L's tail, and thence to a passage and rooms beyond, forming the main part of the building; a new arrival was always a source of interest.

Would monsieur prefer a new bedroom or an old?

Cautiously Wroxham expressed a desire to see both.

An immensely wide passage, which was no use for anything or to anybody, but merely acted as a collector of dust and spiders with very long legs of a most terrifying aspect, the signorina explained (whilst Beppo groaned beneath the weight of Wroxham's trunk), had this spring been converted into five beautiful and airy chambers. The plaster was not yet dry; the wood of windows and doors was still swelling; the furniture was sketchy and odiously modern; but the ceilings were a dream—they were so magnificently old and beautiful that Wroxham remained stock-still for a full couple of minutes with a lamp, which he had snatched from the signorina's hand, raised, his own head craned upward, his lips muttering with delight at the blackened oak beams, with their fantastic and richly-coloured stencilling. With a bang of protest Beppo allowed the trunk to drop to the stone floor and looked at Wroxham reproachfully. . . . English gentlemen were always peculiar in their habits; where a Frenchman or an Italian would have already ordered his dinner, this strange, but otherwise quite nice and polite gentleman, stood and stared at a dirty old ceiling as though it were a priceless treasure. Wroxham jumped at the impact and nearly dropped the lamp. "I will take this room," he said hurriedly, (the room might have been making efforts to escape him), and with an apologetic look at Beppo.

The signorina drew him to one side out of the hearing of Angelo, who always knew too much of the management of the establishment; as a matter of fact,

Wroxham discovered later on, the establishment would have fared badly without Angelo, who practically ran it. "I think," whispered the signorina, "I ought to inform you that these new rooms"—she glanced proudly at the half-dried plaster walls and swollen creaky door—"are seven lira a day. They have cost a great deal, and each has a little loggia." She advanced to another door to the right of the window, which in the gloom Wroxham had not perceived, and, opening it, revealed a tiny balcony with a stone balustrade. Below was a garden stretching away to the orchard of which Mr. Pennant had spoken, and a lagoon; but Wroxham could not distinguish these till morning. "Of course," she continued, "the seven lira are *en pension* terms, everything included." She spoke in the manner of one who might have been guilty of naming an exorbitant sum. "The other rooms are only six lira a day; but these get the morning sun. . . ."

"I should like to take this, signorina, at the price you mention," said Wroxham gravely, casting another stealthy glance at the ceiling when he thought Beppo was not looking. "And is it too late to have some dinner?"

"Too late!" With one comprehensive leap of her thoughts the signorina surveyed the larder and kitchen, sounding their possibilities. "Dinner shall be served for monsieur in a quarter of an hour," said she briefly, and disappeared. Beppo followed; then, after unstrapping the luggage, Angelo.

And so Wroxham entered "Casa Ferolico" to await the coming of Patricia.

CHAPTER XX

PATRICIA'S ENCOUNTER WITH A CENTIPEDE AND A BANTAM COCK

SHE arrived on an evening of great splendour, when Venice—its waterways, canals, lagoons, churches, palaces and buildings were drenched in the light of the dying sun. Who that has seen that fairest of cities at sunset time will ever forget it? It is a memory to be taken out and looked at, and looked at again, hugged closely to the heart, cherished for its sweetness, dwelt upon for its loveliness; a memory that can never fade, is indestructible, deathless, and ever bringing to the possessor a most complete and satisfying contentment.

When Patricia and Miss Ruggles were seated in a roomy black gondola, with its gallant steel prow, its quaint carvings, and burnished heads of horses for the support of the black tiller ropes which were never used, but were merely an ornamental adjunct, a black curly rug at their feet, the luggage in the centre of the boat, and the gondolier—also in black, his low-cut jersey revealing a strong brown throat around which a scarf was loosely knotted—wielding his long, single oar with slow deliberate sweeps of the arm, it seemed they could find no words to express what they felt. In the presence of great beauty the human heart bows down and worships in silence. But the radiance was reflected in their

eyes, on their lips, in their pulses, which beat strong and swift from sheer delight.

"I feel I can hardly bear it," whispered Patricia at length with quivering mouth. They had left the Grand Canal, with its fussy little steamers and innumerable craft, and were now stealing down a little narrow waterway and beneath a bridge which in the dazzling atmosphere became a rainbow span, "it's—unearthly."

Miss Ruggles nodded. "I never conceived it, never could have imagined it, never believed it. . . . I had read Browning, Ruskin. . . . I put it down to their temperaments, to their strongly imaginative and emotional temperaments, but this. . . ." Now they were slipping through the still, golden waters by an ancient house and gateway guarded by a Madonna with bare feet poised upon a crescent moon, one delicious arm raising aloft a lantern of delicately wrought iron. Partly veiling her grave, sweet face with a trail of wistaria, its lovely pendent blossom clustering around her meek white throat as though to guard it from contamination with the world.

Now they were passing a fine old palace whose windows and doors were of curious and most fascinating design, its stencilled walls stained and weathered to the subdued and harmonious colouring of an old Persian carpet. Once, more than likely, it had been flamboyant and garish, now it was a poem in stone of rare and delicate beauty. The water eternally lapping around the broad marble steps at its base had sheathed them in a soft green mantle; an immense knocker of ham-

mered copper on the oaken door struck the one bright note.

In and out of the little waterways they wound, in some parts so narrow that they could almost touch the walls on either side, under bridges and bridges and more bridges. "How many are there?" cried Patricia.

"Over three hundred," replied Miss Ruggles.

"And they are all delicious and all seem to have a distinct character of their own. And oh, look at that little campo—it is a campo, isn't it?—with the lovely scarlet jacket hanging from the latticed window of the dear, tall house all askew as though it had a stitch in its side; and the beautiful man with his wide sombrero hat, and cigarette hanging from his mouth, leaning against the black door—it's just like a picture come to life; and the old grey flagstones lit up blood-red by the dying sun."

"And there's the wistaria Mr. Pennant promised us—just as he said—cascades of it tumbling over that old wall! But that will look better in the freshness of the morning, it seems almost unreal in this magical light, don't you think? I always like my flowers better at sunrise than sunset—when the earth is fresh and unsullied and wet with dew and the day is newly born. Oh, I know I shall get sentimental here, and I mustn't. I hate people running over with sentiment, and spoiling everything with their sickly effusions. . . ." Miss Ruggles pulled herself together hard and stared with frowning brows at the gold and crimson and orange and amber banners flung so splendidly across the sky.

"We shall be happy here, I am sure," she added, as now they entered the Giudecca Canal. "I believe I shall be happier than I have ever been since I was a girl."

But Patricia said nothing. All the way, curiously, she had been thinking of Wroxham. As they passed the picturesque campo and she saw "what a sketch it would make," her thoughts flew to him and the little grassy clearing, the water-wheel, the pear-tree, the whole beautiful picture, and Wroxham standing with that dogged look of resistance on his face, his hand with her sketch-book behind his back, his whole attitude one of "absolute refusal to give in." Again, as they passed the little Madonna, her mind travelled to him. Once he had tried to describe to her the beauty of the face of Bellini's "Madonna with the Two Trees." She was sore and aggrieved when she dwelt upon him, yet she found herself unable to dismiss him from her thoughts. He had treated her badly, she felt—as a friend. Not in any other respect, but as a friend. That she kept clearly before her, or tried to keep. He had not uttered a single word to her that might not have been proclaimed from the housetops. . . . She repeated this over and over again to herself. He might have *looked*—one or two things, but all men looked. . . . "All men *looked*," she repeated over several times to make quite sure that she'd got it right. And he'd done the correct thing, he had called after their tea at the Café des Palmes and their walk to Roquebrun (she was vexed with herself because for some stupid and unaccountable reason the blood would go surging into neck and cheeks every time she

visualised Roquebrun and their walk back through the olive grove . . . "that silly moon," she always finished up pettishly). And he'd most correctly called and left P.P.C. cards. There was nothing in his conduct with which she could find fault, and yet—well, there had been the telephone if he had *really* wanted to say good-bye. He manifestly hadn't. . . .

"I wonder," said Miss Ruggles, "where Mr. Wroxham went? It would have been nice if he could have been in Venice. With his appreciation of the beautiful—just look at the Salute against that flaming sky, I know it's the Salute from the pictures I've so often seen—and his keen artist temperament——"

"I don't agree with you at all about his 'keen artist temperament,'" snapped Patricia. "In fact, I don't think he's got a temperament of any sort but that of a man who lives and does himself well and occasionally takes a little exercise because he's an Englishman and it's inherent, and incidentally to stimulate his liver."

Miss Ruggles looked at her in mild surprise. Two little patches of red burnt in her otherwise pale face. "You always go on so about Mr. Wroxham," Patricia continued, half laughing, but still plainly ruffled. "I don't think he's a scrap artistic, as I've told you, and I still regard his work as most commonplace. And as for his love of the beautiful—— What makes you think that?"

"Did you see the expression on his face the other evening at Roquebrun when he gazed down upon the sea and Cap Martin and Monte Carlo, and the lights

twinkling up the mountain sides and the whole beautiful pageant of night falling softly upon land and water?"

"Can't say that I did."

"No, because you never looked at him, now I come to reflect upon it. You—you daren't," added Miss Ruggles maliciously.

"I *daren't*!" Patricia sat up suddenly and banged her foot against the sharp edge of her own trunk.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because the man's heart was in his eyes whenever he looked at you."

"What rot you talk," said Patricia inelegantly.

"Maybe," returned Miss Ruggles placidly.

"He's behaved very rud—in a very unfriendly fashion, anyhow."

"In what respect?"

"In not personally saying good-bye to us. We had admitted him, considering the brevity of our acquaintanceship, to an unusual degree of intimacy, picnicked with him, taken tea with him, gone walks with him. Then he goes off suddenly after leaving cards in a most formal manner. . . ."

"Perhaps he was pressed for time."

"Pressed for time! Did he look like a man who was pressed for time? Did he look like a man who did anything but get up in the morning in a leisurely fashion, enter his bath prepared by his valet, eat a sumptuous breakfast, slowly peruse *The Times*——"

"He's a Liberal."

"I don't believe it. Anyhow, he's the sort of man who would peruse, not read, *The Times*, stroll to his club or his tailor or down Bond Street, eat a large lunch after a lengthy consideration of the menu, indulge in an afternoon nap . . ."

"Oh, don't go on," cried Miss Ruggles, "I don't want to hear any more, and it's such an unclever and untrue picture of him. You know as well as I that Mr. Wroxham is a vigorous, healthy-minded, clean-living, clean-thinking man, unconventional without any of the pose and affectation of the people who pride themselves on their unconventionality, but unconventional in the sense that he really thinks for himself, and acts according to the standard of right or wrong he has thought out for himself."

"You seem to have acquired a surprising knowledge and understanding of Mr. Wroxham, considering the number of times you have met him amounts to three."

"Yes," said Miss Ruggles placidly, "I have always been noted for my shrewd summing-up of people's characters. You are apparently not gifted in the same way."

Patricia smiled and sniffed. "I believe," said she, "we shall find our 'Casa Ferolico' is situated on one of these coal wharves for which we are making. We are certainly slowing down."

"How interesting," said Miss Ruggles, who was in a mood to enjoy and appreciate whatever lay before her,

from coal wharves to centipedes, so long as they were in Venice. "Yes, we are making for that dark, formidable-looking building."

"If that is 'Casa Ferolico,'" said Patricia, "I shan't get out; I don't like the look of it. I'm convinced if we enter it we shall never come out alive."

"'Casa Ferolico!'" cried the gondolier, with an introductory wave of the arm, as he pulled up at the steps and, with a sharp clever movement, shot Patricia's trunk on to the quay.

Patricia, ten minutes later, was to be found seated on a small bed in a room of vast proportions debating whether she should leave "Casa Ferolico" immediately or wait till the morning. She looked like an isolated patch in the immensity of space around her. The Ferolico's ancestors presumably had had unlimited wealth with which to build these spacious apartments with their magnificent ceilings and marble floors, "but must have become bankrupt before they'd arrived at the furnishing stage," said Patricia bitterly, as her eyes wandered round the empty bareness. "I could have borne it better," she added presently, "if there'd been a soap-dish on the washstand, but just a jug and bowl on that vast plateau of marble . . . not even a receptacle for toothbrushes—now what *can* I do with my toothbrush?" She rose excitedly, and went to the washstand for a closer inspection, hoping her eyes had played her false, but it yielded nothing further; only the jug and bowl; "And not even a full jug," said

Patricia. Now that she was up she went on a further voyage of discovery about her room; it was dimly lighted by two exceedingly tall candles with an air of Roman Catholicism about them. They stood on a table in front of a large gilded mirror which reached from floor to ceiling. She trod cautiously on the cold marble floor, which was ornamented with one small cocoanut mat in the exact centre—another island in a sea of space—for she feared centipedes and other strange creatures. When she reached the mirror she started at her appearance. She had not known she looked like that. It was the species of mirror one occasionally comes across in mildewed lodging-houses, which, owing to the silvering at the back being worn away, causes the glass to be dim and streaked with wavy, bewildering black lines, and reflects the person gazing into it in the same grotesque fashion as does the side of a bright dish-cover or convex side of a silver spoon. Patricia's face looked as though struck by sudden paralysis, "And perhaps it has been," she moaned, "I shouldn't wonder." From the mirror she passed on to further exploration, but found, with the exception of one finely-carved ebony chair and an old hair-covered trunk, that she had exhausted its furnishing properties.

She sat down again upon her bed and folded her hands patiently, to await the arrival of Miss Ruggles. Miss Ruggles had said she would come in about a quarter of an hour's time to fasten up Patricia's dress, as she imagined the staff of servants was limited and bells non-existent. Patricia thought she could just bear up

till then if she repeated to herself soothing and strengthening hymns and poems. She closed her eyes. . . . Suddenly something stirred on her neck and tried to crawl down her back; and, with a wild and blood-curdling shriek, she leapt to the centre of the room right on to the cocoanut mat, and continued to shriek for at least a quarter of a minute, whilst clutching at her feather boa in a frenzied fashion.

"Whatever's the matter?" Miss Ruggles entered at a rush, nearly falling headlong on the slippery, marble floor.

"It's a centipede!" Patricia was now dancing up and down on the mat (Miss Ruggles was forcibly reminded of a picture she had once seen of a Maori chief with face and figure contorted, engaged in the dance of a warrior).

"Where?"

"On my neck," shrieked Patricia, "and it's biting me furiously."

Seizing her firmly by the arm, Miss Ruggles dragged her back to the bed, planked her down, whisked off her feather boa, undid her collar-band and—removed a hairpin, which had caught in the lace. She showed it to Patricia without a word.

"I don't care," cried Patricia hysterically, "I'm not going to stay at this place. It may be a hairpin *this* time, but next it's bound to be a centipede. . . . What's that?" Again she leapt from the bed, and Miss Ruggles with her; they were short of the cocoanut mat this

time. Something was stirring beneath the table in front of the mirror, which was covered with a fine old piece of embroidery reaching to the floor.

"Mr. Pennant said something about owls," whispered Miss Ruggles.

"Owls perch; they don't crawl about floors."

"But there's nothing to perch on," said Miss Ruggles argumentatively.

Again there was a sound of stealthy stirring—the embroidered hanging moved, and slowly a small bantam appeared and stared solemnly at the two trembling women.

"Well!" said Patricia.

"Mr. Pennant also mentioned fowls," said Miss Ruggles; "it's no good pretending we didn't know, and what a nice room this is—a beautiful room." She was rapidly recovering.

"I don't think we ought to talk about the beauty of rooms or anything else," said Patricia scathingly, "till we've settled upon our plan of action with regard to that bantam."

"It strikes me that it would be a futile and fruitless consideration," returned Miss Ruggles, as the bantam skilfully hopped on to the foot-rail of Patricia's bed; "it has a determined and permanent look about it. See! it has manifestly settled down for the night."

The little fowl had ruffled up its feathers in a nice, easy, sleepily suggestive fashion, and its head had drooped forward, while its bright eyes closed.

"It's quite a harmless little thing, and as I fancy it's

a lady, it won't crow in the morning. I should let it remain there if I were you, and not be fussy."

Patricia found herself in the almost unique position of being unable to reply.

"Have you noticed the frescoes?" Miss Ruggles picked up one of the tall candlesticks, regardless of the thin stream of grease which flowed down the fine old sconce of bronze, and rapturously stared at the walls. "Why, I believe they are genuine old frescoes executed by some master hand."

"Really?" Patricia was clearly unimpressed. She seated herself on the bed at some distance removed from the bantam, but allowed her gloomy eyes to rest upon it.

"Yes, they are beautiful. Do you mean to say you haven't noticed them?"

"I just saw there were some slightly improper ladies with no clothes on. I have been too busy looking for the things that are not in the room to have time for those that are."

Miss Ruggles returned the candlestick to the table. "Don't you think," said she, "that you ought to begin to get dressed for dinner?"

"There's nothing to put my toothbrush in." Patricia shot this out as a pellet from a catapult, and the bantam cocked a wary and defensive eye at her.

"But that won't interfere with your dress—"

"And there's no soap-dish—please don't interrupt; and there's no wardrobe nor cupboard, nor a single peg or hook of any description for my clothes. . . ." The bantam shuffled along the rail farther away from Pa-

tricia. "And there's no chest of drawers, not *one* drawer either in the washstand——"

"But I see there's a nice commodious hair trunk—— Why, it must be exactly the same sort of hair trunk to be found in a picture here in Venice by Bassano, which Mark Twain so raved about. Don't you remember it in 'A Tramp Abroad'?" She went down on her knees in ecstasies. "It must be a great age, and so commodious. It would hold heaps of your clothes, all your linen——"

"I should no more dream of putting my linen in that horrible, evil-smelling thing than I should dream of putting it into a coal-scuttle." The bantam dropped to the ground, scurried across the floor with quick little darting steps and sought cover behind the embroidered hanging.

"But why?"

"Why?" Patricia almost shrieked. "Look at it, and you ask me why? A box covered with the skin of an ass, I should say, thousands of years old—probably Balaam's ass; I can smell it here." She got up, re-fastened her boa, and drew on her gloves. "I thought I could have waited till to-morrow, but I find I can't. I must leave here now, this very minute——"

There was a knock at the door and the signorina appeared with a large, finely-embossed copper ewer of boiling hot water and clean towels. She was smiling and cheerful, as sweet and gracious as a benediction. At once the room took on a different aspect. Showing her nice white teeth, she hoped *mam'zelle* was quite

comfortable and had got everything she required. This, for some reason, was the most popular room in the house. Might she mention that dinner would be ready in a quarter of an hour, and where would the ladies like to sit? At a little table in one of the windows, from which a superb view of Venice could be obtained, or at the back of the room near the nice warm stove? These spring evenings were chilly, and, by the way, would mam'zelle like a fire—a nice wood fire? Angelo should come at once and start it.

Miss Ruggles, before Patricia could speak, replied that it was the one thing wanting to complete mam'zelle's happiness and contentment for *that* night. To-morrow, if quite convenient to the signorina, she would like to move to one of the small new and more cheerful rooms—this, though undeniably beautiful, was a little large, and perhaps a trifle desolate. Mam'zelle, who was not very stout, would feel lost in it. The frescoes and the ceiling and the floor were, of course, magnificent, but a room a little cosier . . . and, incidentally, a few pegs and drawers—mam'zelle had many possessions—and perhaps a soap and toothbrush dish would be nearer to mam'zelle's requirements than frescoes. And could the signorina make any suggestions as to what might be done with a small hen seated beneath the table——

“What! Garibaldi here again?” the signorina cried shrilly (Patricia and Miss Ruggles quite started; they had been convinced it was a lady bantam). The signorina stooped and drew Garibaldi from its hiding-

place, opened the window and dropped it into the darkness.

"I can't help it," she explained; "it's taken such a fancy to this room; there's a low wall and a balcony just below, and it easily clammers in when the window is open. To-morrow I will clip its wings and shut it up—that naughty Garibaldi." She was so distressed that Patricia, who had been slowly thawing beneath her geniality, begged her not to say any more about it. In fact, now that Garibaldi had gone she felt she would quite miss him.

"I will tell Angelo to bring the wood at once," said the signorina, anxious to do anything she could to make amends, and to-morrow mam'zelle should be moved and have all the things she required. She looked at the washstand long and earnestly, as though committing the soap and toothbrush dishes to memory. . . . "Just as if one had asked for something quite unusual and extraordinary," said Patricia.

"You have just ten minutes to dress," said Miss Ruggles.

"How did you know there were any smaller and more cheerful rooms?" inquired Patricia.

"I went to look before coming to you. I guessed there was going to be trouble. I had peeped in at yours while you were below paying the gondolier. The place is immense. I went wandering down long passages—the kitchen quarters are at the other side of the house from where we entered, so I met nobody. I finally came to some rooms all on the same side of a passage at the

bottom of some steps; four of them had their doors open, so I went in and had a look at them. They are quite decent—much more furnished and modern; so you shall move to-morrow.”

“And shan’t you?”

“No, I’m satisfied with what I’ve got. It’s better than this, and contains a glorious old cabinet and a *prie-Dieu*; and aren’t you going to get dressed? You’ll be very late.”

Patricia said that she didn’t intend to change that night; she was tired and didn’t know where anything was and couldn’t see herself in the mirror, so what was the use. Miss Ruggles was prepared to argue the point, but found that she was adamant.

“No,” said she, “I won’t. I’ve been unnerved, and I’m coming to bed the minute after dinner.”

“But at least you’ll wash; I’ll find your soap.” Miss Ruggles dived into Patricia’s dressing-bag, and also produced a brush and comb, which Patricia waved to one side. No, she wasn’t going to touch her hair—the mirror made her feel sick and bilious. After washing, she momentarily fell into thought. Miss Ruggles, who had become really attached to the girl, stood and watched her. She thought, in spite of her tumbled hair and plain blue travelling-gown with its neat Quakerish white collar, that Patricia looked wonderfully attractive, her face was flushed, her eyes bright. “What are you thinking of?” she asked. Patricia smiled and, linking arms, they left the room and walked down the long, cold passage to the *salon*. “I was thinking,”

said she, "that sometimes 'to travel hopefully is a much better thing than to arrive.'" She tried to turn the handle of the door as she spoke; somebody at the same instant turned it from the inside; there was a brief struggle and trial of strength, then the door shot back and she nearly fell head first into the arms of Wroxham.

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH OUR HERO AND HEROINE ENGAGE IN A LITTLE CONVERSATION

THE dinner that night at "Casa Ferolico" was unusually good. There was some excellent thick soup, in which little forcemeat balls floated about, and quite the tenderest spring chicken (half of one was served to each person, as they were little larger than Garibaldi), Miss Ruggles declared, that she'd yet come across outside England; and a sweet most beautiful to behold—a hollow circle of something white and glutinous filled with whipped cream and ornamented with pistachio nuts and small crystallised fruits; but Patricia, for all she knew of these dainties, might just as well have been consulting German sausage. Indeed, in a fit of extreme abstraction she helped herself to three crystallised oranges (they were very tiny ones), much to Angelo's distress, for two was the allowance per guest. But Miss Ruggles, whose quick eyes rarely missed anything that mattered, rectified it by taking only one for herself.

Yes, Patricia had received a shock, and she did not attempt to deny it. Wroxham here—at "Casa Ferolico." It was a most amazing and remarkable coincidence! "The world was small" was a trite saying; but still there were such heaps of places and such thou-

sands of hotels and *pensions* scattered over the face of Europe. That he should be here . . . surreptitiously she peeped at him from beneath her eyelashes, but he was gravely and composedly eating his dinner . . . he was seated at the next table but one. He, too, had been amazed (but he'd been clever enough not to overdo it, and he'd looked first to see that the signorina was nowhere about). She recalled his words . . . he'd been unfeignedly delighted. Patricia blushed as, whilst toying with a bit of queer-tasting cheese, she dwelt upon what he had said. Looking up, she surprised Miss Ruggles in a glance of sympathetic amusement. She was smiling covertly behind her table napkin, so Patricia was unable to see the tenderness of it; her eyebrows were arched quizzically, her eyes were full of mischievous humour. Patricia's own dropped again swiftly. Miss Ruggles laughed outright. Leaning across the table in the interval between the courses, when there was a noise and clatter of changing of plates and knives and forks, she asked: "Do you think he knew?" To which Patricia replied with extreme emphasis: "Certainly not. How could he? And . . . do be careful, he'll hear. What a delightful room this is, isn't it?" Which last observation delighted Miss Ruggles exceedingly, for to her certain knowledge Patricia's eyes had been glued to her plate or the tablecloth ever since she had sat down.

"Yes," she replied, "I have been noticing how much you admired it."

At the gentle irony in her voice Patricia cast her a

swift look. "Don't rot, please," she murmured; "I can't stand it."

"All right." Miss Ruggles was filled with sudden compunction. In such wise she knew many marriages trembling in the balance had been marred—the man had taken fright, the girl had feared ridicule and chaff. "I'm sorry." Glancing at Wroxham's grave, determined profile, she could not conceive that he "would take fright"; but Patricia—Patricia was of different stuff; she was peculiarly sensitive and proud. Ruminatingly Miss Ruggles crumbled the rather coarse and delicious-tasting bread. Patricia had told her she had received ten offers of marriage, and she was sure she spoke the truth. This was a large number in days when there was such a superfluity of women and scarcity of men, a large number even for so undeniably attractive a girl as Miss Hastings. Had she been a flirt, Miss Ruggles could have understood it better. Flirts *do* receive offers in spite of what may be said to the contrary, perhaps not from the very nicest of men, but they receive them. Patricia, however, was not that sort. She never denied that she thoroughly liked men, that she enjoyed being in their society, and she sensibly preferred young men to old, but she was not a flirt. "Perhaps it's her frankness and directness and lack of pose," said Miss Ruggles. "The way she flashes out when she's annoyed. . . . Most women are so sweet with men, so anxious to please, or else they adopt the attitude of being superior and beautiful beings and order them about, or they are shy and shrinking and

reserved. Miss Hastings is none of these—there's just the *slightest* suspicion of antagonism in her manner, almost an attitude of defence, as though she feared they *might* make love to her . . . it's curious, and I wonder what it means."

"There seem to be quite a lot of people here," remarked Patricia, as she cracked Barcelona nuts, with an effort at making conversation. "I should think the crowd at that table over there are artists."

"I know all about them, the signorina told me when she took me to my bedroom. I asked if there were any amusing and interesting people here, and she replied, But oh, very; there was a Mr. Sheepshanks, a most queer, queer but very amiable artist, and eleven students, who could paint whole pictures in half an hour which did not seem to represent anything, but were considered very, very clever—they were called 'post' something. There were seven ladies and four gentlemen who were out sketching all day long and did many wonderful pictures, but she, the signorina, out of her ignorance, never quite knew which way up they should be examined; she invariably, to her great shame, turned them upside down."

Patricia laughed. "That is palpably Mr. Sheepshanks with his eleven students, and how his name suits him—he's like a woolly animal, with his mop of shaggy hair and whiskers and rough woolly clothes; and how that youth is holding forth. That bald-headed soldierly looking man seems rather bored. And the ladies—poor dears!—are living up to their profession and what is

expected of them. What queer garments some of them have!"

Miss Ruggles agreed. "There's only one well-dressed girl among them, and I expect she paints the best of the lot. . . ." There was a general rising and pushing back of chairs on the polished floor. Wroxham immediately came to Miss Ruggles and Patricia. He had been thinking out his plan of campaign all through dinner. He would be patient and diffident and backward no longer. No more would he wear out his shoe leather in tramping about roads and streets, up hill and down dale, in a fruitless search for Patricia. He was now on the very spot, in the same house with her, under the same roof, taking his meals within speaking distance of her, able to feast his eyes upon her every movement, and all this he had achieved by his own forethought and cunning judgment. Was he going to waste his well-earned opportunities by behaving like a raw, awkward, bashful schoolboy? No, he was going to shove, push, storm the position. He was going to do it as delicately and tactfully and as discriminatingly as was possible (seeing he wanted Patricia so badly), for fear of frightening her off, or driving her away; but he was going to do it. He started now by asking her and Miss Ruggles where they would like to sit; there were some comfortable easy-chairs at the far end of the *salon*, out of any draughts and some distance removed from the large table with the lamps, around which the guests were already clustering with their books and patience cards and writing materials. Would they come

and sit there, and might he order them some coffee? He led the way, as he spoke, ensconced them each in a deep, comfortable chair, found footstools, fetched a table for the coffee, offered cigarettes, and then sank into a chair beside Patricia with the air of a man satisfied that he'd earned what he'd been working for, and nobody should snatch it from him.

"He looks nice in his dress clothes," Patricia thought. There were only two other men in the room who wore them; one was the bald-headed, soldierly looking man, and the other a tall, good-looking elderly Frenchman with two nieces, who had sat at the next table to Miss Ruggles and Patricia.

Patricia casually mentioned that she'd not had time herself to change.

"She's been through such harassing experiences in her room," chipped in Miss Ruggles. "First of all there was a centipede; then a bantam cock appeared from beneath a table and settled down for the night on the rail of her bed; then she'd no soap-dish——"

"And nothing to hold my toothbrush," added Patricia.

"And there was no furniture—nothing in which to keep her clothes save a hair trunk which she swore was made out of Balaam's ass."

Wroxham looked puzzled and demanded an explanation.

"It was such an old trunk, and covered with the skin of some animal. She was just leaving with a sort of 'Excelsior' look on her face, a look which said she

would rather plough through snow and ice in search of some other resting-place than stay where she was; then the signorina arrived, and here she is."

"The signorina is wonderful," said Wroxham. "But there are other rooms—they face east, and look on to a real old Italian garden. They have little loggias, and when the early morning sun shines in are charming. Couldn't you move?"

They told him that Patricia was doing so in the morning.

"And you like the place?" he asked anxiously.

"Well, of course, fowls in your bedroom——" began Patricia.

"I know," he interrupted. "I have ants, swarms of them, but the ceiling! What is it like in your room?"

Patricia said she hadn't looked. She had been too busily taken up with other things, and the room was so badly lighted.

But it was really awfully comfortable here, said Wroxham. The cooking was A 1—didn't they think so?—and everything so clean. They should see the kitchen—fine old copper and brass pans, and everything shining like silver; and the view from the windows could not be surpassed, and it was so well situated. . . . On the Grand Canal it was stuffy and often malodorous, but here the freshness seemed to come up from the sea; and although one appeared to be in a remote quarter, the service of little steamers was so good from the landing stage close at hand that one

could be at St. Mark's, the centre of everything, in a quarter of an hour. And the orchard and vineyards at the back leading down to a lagoon were enchantingly beautiful just now; he would like to have the pleasure of taking them down there to-morrow if they would allow him. . . . And so on, and so on. . . . Wroxham might have been holding a brief for "Casa Ferolico," his enthusiasm for it was so great.

"You have stayed here before?" asked Patricia.

He shook his head in the negative. "Have you noticed the one or two old pieces of furniture in this room—that cabinet, for instance, to the left of the door as you enter from the staircase?" He put the question quite unhurriedly, so Patricia's suspicions were not aroused.

"I have," said Miss Ruggles; "the room is pretty bare of furniture—not that I don't like its big, restful spaciousness—but what there is is good. I want to examine that cabinet more closely, and I'm also going to fetch a shawl."

"Are you cold?" inquired Wroxham; "and are you?" anxiously to Patricia. He didn't want to move nearer to the stove and the round table and people. Here one could talk unheard, and the corner which embraced their chairs commanded a pleasant view of the long, fine old room, its polished floor softly reflected by lamp- and candle-light—the candles, in tall, twisted iron sconces, standing on either side in rows like a guard of honour. Behind them the blinds were up above three large windows, and they looked on to the

waters of the lagoon, the other and *salle à manger* end of the L overlooked the Giudecca Canal and Venice.

Patricia, in the depths of her chair, was in shadow, only her face and bright hair and wide, white collar gleamed forth palely in the candle-light. She returned to her charge when Miss Ruggles had disappeared. "I wonder how you came to hear of 'Casa Ferolico'?"

"Through a friend, Miss Hastings." Wroxham emitted little spirals of smoke which he watched reflectively.

"A friend who had stayed here?"

"No; a friend of a friend who had stayed here."

"Did you hear of it just recently?"

"Yes . . . why?"

"Oh," Patricia became confused; "I just wondered if Mr. Pennant had happened to mention it to you that afternoon at Roquebrun?"

"No."

"Had you any idea of coming to Venice when—when we last met?" Patricia was painfully conscious that her questions sounded like a catechism, but one of her most salient characteristics had always been to "thrash things out." She experienced an overwhelming desire to clear up this "remarkable coincidence" and prove to Miss Ruggles that Wroxham's being here was a sheer accident and not, as she had tried to hint, by design.

"No, I can't say that I had;" Wroxham successfully achieved a perfect "ring" with the smoke from his

cigarette; he spoke in his customary thoughtful, deliberate and perfectly polite manner, but there was just a something in his voice, an indefinable something, that told Patricia he was not to be drawn, and she felt slightly irritated and, at the same time, amused.

"It just suddenly came to you that you would come."

"That was it—it just suddenly came to me that I would come."

"Are you, if I may ask, going to make a long visit?"

"I don't know; that will depend on several things. Are you?"

"Well, Miss Ruggles has to be back at Nice to conduct a cousin to England at the end of May, and I——"

"And you?" asked Wroxham with interest.

"May go on to the Italian lakes and then into Switzerland and home."

"Your home being——?" Wroxham was now doing the catechising.

"At Little—Oh, in—in England, I mean."

"I see," said Wroxham, very gravely.

Patricia peeped at him from the depths of her chair, but his eyes were on a fresh cigarette he was lighting. She wondered why he didn't smoke his old black pipe, and said so.

"I couldn't here and—with you."

"You did the other day at Roquebrun."

"But that was out of doors away in a remote village."

"Well, pretend this is a remote village or that I'm not here."

"I prefer you to the pipe," he said with such earnestness that Patricia burst out laughing. There was no graceful badinage or easy persiflage about Wroxham's conversation. He could make love but he could never flirt, and there is a great distinction,

"I don't in the least object to the pipe," said Patricia, "and I am sure it would make you happier."

"What makes you think that?" he asked, amused.

"Only from the way in which you looked at it and handled it the other day. I'm always interested in watching men's attitude towards their smoking accessories—from it I can often judge their characters."

Wroxham felt warmed at the opening of her speech—he was flattered by her observation of his movements—the conclusion of it chilled him a little, he was only one of many.

"And what did you gather of *my* character from the way in which I handled my pipe?"

"That you were faithful to old friends, old possessions; that you did not like change, that you were strongly Conservative, in fact."

"As a matter of fact I flatter myself I'm extremely Liberal."

"I don't think you are," she pronounced.

"May I inquire your reasons for having arrived at such a conclusion?" he asked, amused.

"I have no reasons beyond your furious frowning

at the motor cars on the Corniche road, your distress when you heard Monsieur P  p   proposed extending the funicular right into Mentone—‘And we shall have droves of people, the class of people we don’t want, coming up,’ those were your words; and your satirical comments on the fresh outrages recently perpetrated by the Suffragettes. Your attitude in these three cases did not express what I had always conceived to be the true spirit of Liberalism.”

He laughed and drew his pipe from his pocket before making any reply.

“I take it, too, that you have little interest or sympathy with the Feminist movement?”

“Have *you*?” There was such ill-concealed horror in his voice that Patricia, who tried to frown, ended in a laugh.

“Of course.”

“Oh!” said he.

“Haven’t you?”

“Up to a certain point—yes. I have always felt deep sympathy with women in their work in the world, and I like and respect them—they are so plucky.”

“But you would keep them at home?”

“Yes,” said he.

“Looking after and devoting themselves to their husbands and children?”

“Retaining the devotion and respect of their husbands and children,” he corrected.

“You would not give them the vote?” queried Patricia.

He puffed at his pipe thoughtfully for a moment or two. "No," said he.

Patricia made a slight movement of impatience.

"Do you want one?" he asked hurriedly.

She rose and stood with her slim body balanced against the arm of the chair, her hand resting lightly on the back, her eyes on the waters of the lagoon, silvered here and there by the lights from the picturesque lanterns which stood on tall posts marking the channel.

"I don't know"—she spoke thoughtfully. "I'm not particularly keen, yet it seems hardly fair that I, who am intelligent—nothing more; I don't pretend to be educated, for my father was old-fashioned; I was not allowed to go to school nor abroad. I only had a governess—the real old, prehistoric kind, with beautiful manners, who taught me nothing that really mattered or counted; so I'm ignorant by the standard of the modern girl, but I think I'm intelligent! Yet I'm denied a vote—I'm about to offer you the threadbare and time-worn argument for your consideration—I am denied a vote, when my servants—my gardeners, coachman, groom, chauffeur, butler, footman——" Suddenly she broke off. What was she saying? In Heaven's name what was she saying? She looked confusedly at Wroxham, but he, too, was gazing through the window at the lights on the lagoon. . . . "I mean," said she, recovering herself, "take all the women who have servants; it seems hard, a little inconsistent . . . a little. . . ." She had lost the thread of her discussion; the shock she had received through her own careless

words had made her forget the subject of their conversation. "Oh, what was I talking about?"

"The vote," replied Wroxham imperturbably. "You were saying"—he was still gazing out into the night—"that it seems hard and inconsistent that you, as an intelligent girl, should be denied the vote, while your servants—your gardeners, coachman, groom, chauffeur——"

"Of course I was speaking of a hypothetical girl," interrupted Patricia a little wildly.

"Well, a hypothetical girl with gardeners, coachman, groom, chauffeur——"

(Oh, he wasn't going through them all again! . . .)

"I—I think I see Miss Ruggles," she cried in a voice of immense relief. "She is beckoning me" (she wasn't, as a matter of fact, she was merely flapping out her shawl before putting it on). "I expect she wants me to go to bed. . . . I said I was tired. Good-night, Mr. Wroxham."

He got up and accompanied her down the long room. Again an overpowering desire, as on the train travelling to Mentone and in the olive grove, came upon him to seize her and strain her to his heart. She was so provocative and so charming and so almost childlike at times. At the door at the far end of the room giving on to the passage he said good-night. He did not take her hand; again he could not trust himself. "Sleep well," he said in what Patricia called to herself his "curt voice." Then he returned to his arm-chair and smoked for an hour in deep thought. "Butler, foot-

men, coachmen!" What did it mean? And she had referred more than once in his presence to her "hard-upness." He recollected her conversation on the promenade in reference to the sale of her bath, in order to raise funds for her proposed expedition with Miss Ruggles to Ste. Agnèse; he smiled tenderly at the recollection. "Butler, footmen, gardeners, chauffeur!" and her confusion, almost dismay, at her slip just now, and her poor recovery—again he smiled at that; it had been so very poor. She was intelligent as she said, but her histrionic ability was not marked. And her home . . . "Little—I mean England." There was Littlehampton . . . and Littlestone, Little Wymondley. Who was she—a girl wandering about the Continent unchaperoned?—and he could perceive that she was drawn from the class whose chaperonage would be pretty strict—and why was she playing this part? "Bless her," said Wroxham, as he knocked the ashes from his pipe; and "God bless her," he added, as he passed her door (her blue skirt hung outside for brushing) on his way to bed.

CHAPTER XXII

WROXHAM RECEIVES A LETTER WHICH OPENS HIS EYES

WROXHAM'S eyes were opened the following day. The morning's post brought him a letter from his cousin Dick Charteris, forwarded by Smithers.

Dick Charteris was a bit of a scapegrace, and usually wrote for the "loan of a few pounds." More often than not Wroxham complied with the request, for Dick, his mother's sister's only son, had the engaging qualities of character so frequently possessed by scapegraces. But at times he—Wroxham—hardened his heart and wrote and told his cousin he was a "damned young fool." To work himself up to this pitch occasioned Wroxham much inward groaning of spirit—he would have infinitely preferred sending the money as being less troublesome, and because he detested the attitude of preaching and playing the "heavy father." This morning he forwarded a cheque for twenty pounds immediately after finishing his breakfast; the "young scapegrace" had asked for the modest loan of ten pounds.

On receiving the letter—it was lying on his breakfast-table—Patricia and Miss Ruggles were taking their *petit déjeuner* in their rooms—he pushed it aside with a slight movement of impatience while he cut a crisp roll in two. It would contain the usual request, and it was not a month since he had heard from the lad.

The coffee, really excellent, strong, creamy, with a delicious froth at the top, served in small, quaint-shaped copper pots, restored his good-humour. With a knife he cut the envelope and drew forth the letter covered with Dick's well-known sprawling caligraphy. The opening lines amused him: ". . . Smithers was immovable, mute as the head of a pumpkin. He refused to say where you were, or give your address. What a chap to have! My man in India gives me away all over the place, confound him! He's corrupt to the core, but keeps my clothes well. I sat on the table, chirruped to Richy Dick, fed him with sugar, endeavoured in a crooning voice to imitate the rubbish you indulge in when you tickle his head; but Richy Dick would have none of it, and I pumped Smithers. Towards the end he yielded a few drops of information—my honest, open countenance and ingenuous manner were too much *even* for him. 'Well, he's travelling incog., sir; no harm in telling you that.'

"'Whatever for?' I demanded. 'Been stealing?'

"'No, sir; I have my own private views as to why the master's run away,' and he just gave the faintest, the most infinitesimal of—well, scarcely a wink, Smithers is above that—say, a poetic suggestion of a wink, and Richy Dick burst into a rippling sort of jolly song expressive of sudden amusement. On your mantelshelf I saw rows and rows of unopened letters, pretty feminine-looking notes for the most part. My rapid and acute mind put two and two together, and they made four with astonishing accuracy. 'Ha! ha!' said I to

myself. 'Old David's run away from them. A bit too much they were. *This* is the penalty of greatness! Poor old chap's being lionised merely because he can paint a thing like sunlight—we're d——d sick of it in India, and would immortalise a man who could give us nice grey clouds charged with jolly rain and of the appearance of the British-made article.'

"I pictured you as I walked on to the club, dodging and running and hedging 'em off in your inimitable polite way, and a spasm of laughter caught me in the ribs. . . . I wish I could get a bit of it—all the hostesses with nice daughters after me! I shouldn't run away, you bet. . . ." Here came the usual request for the temporary loan. Then the part that made Wroxham sit up. . . . "I was down in the country the other day, staying at a house in Little Wyfleet, in Essex; some old Indian pals of mine live there. I took a girl in to dinner—queer sort of demure girl, who said things as grave as a judge, and gave you the sneaking impression she was all the time laughing up her sleeve. I took rather a fancy to her, but a big chap on the opposite side of the table, named Elwick, scowled whenever I became sort of more than passing friendly. She told me a queer yarn about a cousin of hers—I'd got her monkey up by saying most girls I met were selfish and thought of nothing but money—who'd gone abroad on the cheap, on her own, in search of experience, and to practise all the little economies—the beastly little soul-destroying economies, don't I know 'em" (Wroxham smiled at this) "that poor devils like myself are

so familiar with. She imagined she was selfish, this girl, self-centred and too luxurious, so has gone in for a bit of plain living and scourging of the flesh, so to speak. 'Why didn't she go in for slumming like the others?' I asked.

" 'What others?' replied Miss Moffat.

" 'The rich women who suddenly spring consciences and are devoid of tact.' (You don't know me in this vein, do you, Wroxham? I'm a man of many parts.)

" 'She's not like that,' said Miss Moffat. 'She possesses true delicacy of feeling. She would shrink from entering a poor person's house without invitation, even if the occupant were starving. And she didn't want to see or study that side of life. . . . It's the people who just have enough and nothing over . . . and she wanted to feel what it was like not to be able to spend.'

" It struck me as being a rather queer coincidence. You've run away from your friends; this Patricia—I've forgotten her other name—has run away from her money, and I shouldn't be surprised to hear you'd run into each other. I've heard of queerer things.

" Good-bye, old man. Sorry you're away. I like yarning with you in the studio when I'm over, and watching your polite manœuvring and dodging to get me out of it.

" Yours as ever,

" DICK."

When Wroxham had finished this epistle he wrote the cheque, fetched his straw hat, and went away into the

old garden at the back, and beneath endless stretches of vine-clad pergolas to the lagoon. His thoughts, at first, were a trifle confused; he felt all topsy-turvy. . . . The girl he had imagined poor, the girl he had pitied when he had heard her debating whether she could afford the price of a simple donkey ride, the girl upon whom he had allowed himself in imagination the luxury and pleasure of heaping presents . . . this girl was an heiress, and was only playing at being hard up. It was just the sort of thing she would do, play a part—if she couldn't get what she sought by any other method—and play it badly. That was the side of it that touched Wroxham, touched him to his very heart's core, the badness of her playing. He felt towards her as one might feel towards a little lovable child chasing with faltering footsteps something bright and beautiful, such as a sunbeam, and bringing along with it its dolls and woolly lambs and other encumbrances, because it loves them so and cannot bear to be parted from them. A life of sacrifice was what Patricia sought, a life of "doing without things," a life of putting yourself in another person's place; and she had brought along with her all the little accessories that helped to make the old life pleasant: the dainty shoes and stockings, the pretty petticoats—Wroxham was an observant man—the charming hats, and all the little luxuries in the way of scents, purses, bags, fluffy boas and lace fripperies with which the feminine mind loves to surround itself. Later he said to her: "You never really experienced the sensations of a poor woman because you

never looked like one; it's the *looking* it that's the rub," and penitently she agreed. But in conception it had been a fine and plucky thing to do—at least, so Wroxham thought; but then he was prejudiced. He turned about from the bank upon which he had been sitting at the edge of the lagoon, and retraced his footsteps to search for her. He was filled with an overmastering desire just to look upon her and watch her play her part.

Half-way beneath the first shady pergola he met her stepping daintily over the grass, which was slightly wet; there had been a shower of rain in the night, but now the sun was shining in a cloudless sky. She wore a gown of palest blue, and around her neck was a long chain of uncut turquoises. It was simple in design, but Wroxham knew that its cost must have been considerable. On her head was the same big shady hat, with the preposterous white rose nodding alone that he had seen before. No, she did not look poverty-stricken.

"Well, how are you liking 'Casa Ferolico' this morning?" he inquired, when they had greeted one another. She had not expected to meet him down here, and the sudden encounter brought the swift colour to her cheeks.

"Much better, thank you; in fact, at the moment, tremendously, having just seen the most heavenly apple-tree in full bloom; also a peach, and the blossom of a peach-tree in an old Italian garden set about with little statuettes and prim box-edged flower-beds, with the family washing as a background, is something that can

be believed when seen, but could have never been conceived." Her eyes were full of happiness and her hair of the sunshine which flickered through the leaf-crowned pergola.

"It *is* charming," he agreed. "You are not going back," for she had turned about. "Won't you come and have your first look at the lagoon by day from below that bank, which from here screens it from view?"

"I'm afraid I haven't time; I said I would meet Miss Ruggles in a quarter of an hour at the door, and I've been lingering, there were so many things to see—Angelo, for instance, at his building."

"'Balbus built a wall,' " quoted Wroxham, which was lost upon Patricia, not being a classical scholar.

"Does he do everything?" she asked. "I've already seen him in the capacity of porter, waiter, *valet de chambre*, caterer—I was watching him, while I had my breakfast, land innumerable provisions—vegetables, fish, fruit—from a small boat at the quay, which I concluded he'd been across the canal to purchase, and now in a picturesque blue overall he's building walls."

"Yes, he's a wonder, that lad, and the signorina relies upon him for every mortal thing, though she's not conscious of it; and he likes to have his finger in every pie."

"I've just succeeded in furnishing a room without his assistance."

"You've moved, then?" asked Wroxham.

"I have. I passed an awful night; I had three nightmares. In the first I was being tossed by an ass—I

suppose it was that hair trunk—fancy the ignominy, tossed by an ass, and I a skilful horsewoman!”

Patricia did not observe her slip, but Wroxham did, and immediately took it up. “You ride then?”

“Oh, yes, a great deal; and I hunt.”

“Indeed! May I ask where?”

“Down in——” There was a dead stop. Patricia had remembered. “Down in, down in . . . well, as a matter of fact I’ve not been hunting for some time. . . . I’ve——” She was stumbling painfully, but Wroxham was inexorable.

“Yes, you’ve——”

“I—I’ve been abroad.”

“Of course; but when you are at home?”

“I believe,” said Patricia, “I see Miss Ruggles. We’d better hurry.”

“I think not,” said Wroxham quietly, “it’s a maid hanging out more washing.”

“Still, we’d better hurry, I don’t want to keep her. Let me see, I was telling you about my nightmares. . . .”

“No, your hunting,” he contradicted.

“But before that,” she said crossly. “I’d got to the ass tossing me; it sent me flying over a precipice and I alighted in a rhubarb bed—such a funny place to meet a rhubarb bed. In my second dream I had become a Suffragette—that was our talk last evening—and insisted upon marrying Mr. Asquith, although polygamy is not permitted in this country; he wasn’t at all nice to me, took me to Margate and gave me the slip. In the third I was a mummy—that’s Mr. Pennant—trying

to get out of my swathings and come to life, but they wouldn't yield—it was an awful sensation. . . . Are you interested? ”

“Deeply,” said Wroxham.

“And after that I remained wide awake for two hours with my mouth full of bedclothes, trying to suppress my shrieks at the noises I heard: hootings and flappings and slitherings—have you ever read ‘Dracula’? Yes? Well, I imagined I could hear Dracula creeping on bat-like hands and knees down the wall outside my window.”

“Probably it was Garibaldi the bantam cock.”

“Perhaps it was,” agreed Patricia. “I never thought of that; but now I think I shall be comfortable in my new quarters. Miss Ruggles and I have carried a washstand—a nice large one—from one of the empty rooms; from another we’ve taken some pegs, and from a third an easy-chair.”

“And what does the Signorina say to this raiding? ”

“She’s delighted with the result.”

“That’s so exactly like the Italian character—be happy in the present. Don’t worry about the future.”

“Yes; what would she do if she’d a sudden influx of visitors? ”

“Steal it back from you,” he laughed. “And Miss Ruggles really *is* coming this time.” At the slight emphasis on the word Patricia cast him a swift glance, but his face was grave and his manner imperturbable.

Miss Ruggles, after a pleasant “Good-morning” to Wroxham, wondered what they were going to do first.

She seemed to include him in her interrogation, and, acting upon his avowal to himself the preceding night that backwardness and timidity in his courtship of Patricia, now that he had so skilfully engineered their again meeting, should not be laid to his discredit, he replied, "What would you like to do? I am open to anything; and if you would pass the compliment upon me of allowing me to act as your pilot on this, your first day in Venice, I venture to think you would have no cause to regret it, for in the difficult capacity of guide I have, if a compeer, at least no superior."

"You are modest," said Patricia, with a smile. "In what manner are you so excellent a cicerone?"

"Try me and you will discover for yourself. Perhaps the ability to see with the eyes of the sightseer has been my most marked characteristic up to now—sympathy, in fact. Because I know, say, St. Mark's well, and though custom may have staled it to me a little, I shan't be unable to enter into your first fine frenzy of delight at it, and if you are able to see beauty in a rusty nail, I shall sit and gaze at that rusty nail till I, too, discover its fair points."

They laughed at the mock solemnity of his voice.

"Shall we," said Miss Ruggles, "engage this fellow? He is not modest, but he sounds intelligent."

"Ask him his price," said Patricia.

"It shall be stated at the end of the day."

("Oho!" thought Miss Ruggles, "so he's going to make a day of it!")

"And where shall we lunch?" she asked aloud.

"I know of a place that will delight your hearts on the Riva; and tea, of course, must be on the Piazza. Are you ready?"

"Quite," said Miss Ruggles.

"I should suggest we took a gondola by the day. I know of an excellent man, one Pietro, who knows Venice inside out, is moderate in his charges, and whose only failing is garlic; but as his position in the boat is somewhat distantly removed——"

"Let us find this Pietro," said Miss Ruggles, "as I said before, he sounds a likely fellow. Let us be moving."

Happily the three proceeded along the quay to the little pier, discovered Pietro lolling in the sunshine, and soon they were cleaving their way through the cool silvery waters of the Giudecca.

Four o'clock found them having tea on the Piazza, eating the little thin cakes covered closely with chopped almond so common in Italy. Long ago Patricia had found it was useless to ask for bread and butter on the Continent, it did not exist, one might as easily procure chopped hay.

There was the usual crowd to be seen at this hour. It was warm, unusually warm for Venice in the spring. May had come in as softly and tenderly as a caress. Many tourists had already arrived for the Whitsuntide celebrations, and in a steady stream they poured in and out of St. Mark's. A flag fluttered gaily from one of the three masts in front of the Cathedral, the pigeons

strutted and strolled with confidence about the people's feet, the two familiar figures of the big blue-faced clock came out from their hiding-places and with their gongs struck the hour, the sunshine seemed to make a special point of picking out the gold mosaic lunette to the right of the Cathedral as you enter the lunette which so quaintly represents outraged Mussulmans sniffing with outraged noses at what they believed to be a basket of pork concealed beneath rushes and leaves, but which, in reality, contained the bones of the saintly monk himself.

"It was thus that his remains were smuggled from Alexandria to Venice eight centuries after his death, the story goes," said Wroxham, "by two Venetian sea captains."

"Dear St. Mark, I feel I love him already," said Patricia, "his spirit seems to brood over everything."

"Talking of spirits—why, bless my soul, if it isn't Mr. Pennant in the flesh!" ejaculated Miss Ruggles as the resolute figure of the little man, accompanied by the Hoaxe on a lead, elbowed his way through the crowds straight to their table. His costume was more remarkable than ever: black and white check knickerbockers revealing a pair of legs, thin, but undeniably straight (Mrs. Snape had been guilty of a libel), white tennis shoes, a black morning coat, and a brand-new straw hat. "For all the world like a nigger minstrel," said Miss Ruggles.

"I thought I should find you here; English people spend half their time abroad in indulging in prolonged afternoon teas," he pronounced. "I said to the Little

Evil One, 'We will make a bee-line for St. Mark's Piazza, to the Café Dandolo,' and here you are."

They all shook him warmly by the hand; they were unfeignedly glad to see him.

"We only wanted you and the Hoaxe to complete our happiness. No, the Hoaxe can't sit on my skirt, it's a clean one," said Miss Ruggles; "he must just lie on the nice warm pavement and not be a pampered beast. You don't seem very surprised to see Mr. Wroxham."

"I'm not." Mr. Pennant ordered a roll and two pats of butter with his tea. "I'd no lunch," he explained. "I was nosing round Verona till it was too late and I'd only just time to catch my train."

"But why aren't you surprised? I thought you once said the unexpected never happened."

"This wasn't unexpected; if I'd *not* found Mr. Wroxham seated here I should have been much more astonished. Mr. Wroxham is the type of man who does the expected thing. If I met him at Zermatt I should say to myself, 'This man will be the first to ascend the Matterhorn this year,' and he'd do it. He liked our society; he is a man of judgment——"

"Don't forget I'm sitting here," suggested Wroxham.

"I'm not. When he heard you were going to Venice he decided he'd go too."

"But he didn't know," interrupted Patricia. "We met by accident at 'Casa Ferolico.' It was a most remarkable coincidence."

"Strange," said Mr. Pennant. Suddenly he turned upon Wroxham and examined him critically. "Do you agree that it was a remarkable coincidence?"

"No," replied Wroxham coolly, "and I am also wondering by what right you are putting us through this searching examination."

Mr. Pennant laughed good-humouredly. "Only that I am interested in anything out of the common, any unusual phenomena. If you did meet by accident at 'Casa Ferolico,' well, I agree with Miss Hastings it was rather remarkable; if you didn't . . ."

"If we didn't?" Wroxham was quite calm.

"You exactly fulfil the idea I had conceived of you as being a man who does and gets what he wants. . . . Waiter, one milk for the little dog. Hungry, you little Son of Satan? And, now, what do you all think of 'Casa Ferolico'?"

Patricia, thankful to change the subject, rushed at "Casa Ferolico" with outstretched arms. In glowing terms she dwelt upon its attractive points, never so much as hinting at the presence of centipedes and bantams in her room, or the absence of pegs and tooth-brush dishes, and Mr. Pennant was manifestly pleased.

"I've got a room next to yours," he said, "and there's no furniture in it at present save a bed."

She replied that it was all in hers, and that she trusted he would not unsettle things by taking it from her. He said he could manage if he just had a wash-stand and one chair, and she told him there was a wash-stand in the room the other side of him, and she would

help him to move it when they got back; about the chair she could offer no help or suggestion.

"My dress suit is at present lying on the floor, and there are a good many ants—the large variety."

Miss Ruggles suggested the bed would be more convenient as a resting-place for clothes.

"Yes, and move everything when you get into it," he replied. He next demanded what they thought of St. Mark's.

"You mustn't be so previous. In about a year's time we might be able to tell you," laughed Patricia. "At present it's just percolating, percolating drop by drop into our souls, there to be treasured up, for each drop's—a pearl. Now doesn't that remind you of a famous authoress?"

"It's just rank sentiment," he grumbled. "Four words sum it up: magnificent, bizarre, Occidental and bad."

"Bad!" Miss Ruggles was horrified.

"Bad," he repeated firmly, "bad in every sense of the word. I know that to the average man it is a vision of loveliness—a winning loveliness of radiant glowing colour, domes, pinnacles, arches, pillars, massed in symmetrical beauty against the blue of the sky. I know all that Ruskin has said of it, but Ruskin was a fool. Architecturally . . ." he paused; the Hoaxe's lead had become entangled in the leg of the table, and Miss Ruggles seized the opportunity to break in. She saw that he was off at a tangent; that he was apparently on one of his pet topics; that he was about

to scarify St. Mark's till his breath gave out; and, with people sitting all around them, people sitting glorying in the beautiful and fantastic old church as she herself was glorying, she felt that for their sakes as well as her own and Patricia's she must stop him. . . . Better get him away to Egypt, and quickly. "Have you," she asked, when he was satisfied that the Hoaxe was not being strangled, "made any further plans about going to Egypt in search of your new mummy?"

"In search of my new mummy? I don't know what you mean." His tone was distinctly irate.

Miss Ruggles became soothing. "Don't you recollect telling us that the sarcophagus you found in the tomb of Amen-Hotep IV. did not contain your remains, and that Monsieur Lafayette had informed you you were buried in the tomb of your grandfather, Amen-Hotep II.?"

"Oh, that! But I can't be finding my new mummy if the other was somebody else; I do like people to be exact. I shall go in search of the remains of my former self—that is the way to put it. Yes, I shall start in the autumn; my plans are maturing. Monsieur Lafayette has put much valuable information at my disposal, and the Hoaxe and I have had things revealed to us since you left—momentous things, and they will help us, they——"

"Tell us where you were at the moment of revelation. I always like to picture your environment," said Miss Ruggles, and he was pleased at the interest she displayed.

"We were up in the cemetery—seated on the coping of the low wall that runs round it, looking down on the scene below. Night was falling; the scent of the flowers around came to us sweet and fresh; a single star glittered in the blue above. Suddenly the Hoaxe whined uneasily, and put his nose into my hand, while his hair stirred uneasily all along his spine. 'What is it, Oxhos?' I whispered."

"Oxhos!" Patricia couldn't forbear the interruption.

"Oxhos is another name for the Hoaxe, as is Holian; they all mean the same thing: little one."

"But isn't it confusing for him?"

"Not at all. A man is not confused when you call him Robert, or Bob, or Robbie."

"But a dog——"

"The Hoaxe has a great deal more intelligence than the average man of the name of Bob, as you must know." Mr. Pennant was veering towards slight irritability.

"Sorry," murmured Patricia. "What happened next?"

"'What is it, you little thing?' I repeated. He had begun to growl fiercely now, and his hair bristled like an animated pan-brush. Suddenly he broke away and disappeared—a flash of white in the surrounding gloom. Then I knew: somewhere within half a mile was an Aberdeen terrier, and the Hoaxe went forth to bring death to that tyke."

"But why?" inquired Wroxham.

"I thought I had told you that before psychic communication an Aberdeen terrier invariably appears, which the Hoaxe is impelled to remove. Why, I know not. There is no fight, no scrimmage, no snarling. It is a soundless and bloodless battle. One moment the Aberdeen terrier is here, the next he is dead, with a bleak and fearful expression on his face, but not a mark of disfigurement. I sat and waited. Presently he returned and crouched down beside me, his head on his paws, his eyes dark, inscrutable, gazing into the shadows that lurked amongst the tombstones. I knew that psychic phenomena were close at hand. Suddenly there came a sensation of a breath of cold, clammy air enfolding one, engulfing one, almost suffocating one, and this gradually but perceptibly materialised, till I saw before me the figure of Amen-Hotep IV., King of Egypt. For a moment I trembled greatly, while the Hoaxe lay flat on his face and shivered like a leaf in the wind. Then I cried: 'Oh, Mighty Bull! Oh, Mighty One of the Double Plumes! Oh, King of the North and South, to thee I humble myself! What is thy desire?'"

"But surely it was yourself, your former self, to whom you were speaking?" again Patricia interrupted. "Why should you humble yourself—well, to yourself? I can't understand; it's so very difficult." She passed a hand across her brow.

"Because your mind is too finite, because you are too material, because your soul——" It is difficult to say what epithets he might not have hurled at poor

Patricia's soul, if once again Miss Ruggles, with consummate skill, had not brought him up short: "Never mind all that; we know we're stupid, but we've never had a chance, have we?" Just the merest flicker of a wink she presented to Patricia and Wroxham. "What did Amen-Hotep IV. want with you?"

"He wished to give me instructions about the finding of his sarcophagus—his and mine. He wished to lay upon me a solemn charge not to commit an act of desecration by conveying our mummy to the museum at Cairo. 'Let us lie where we were placed,' cried he; 'it is horrible, monstrous, iniquitous, this rifling of the tombs of the great and mighty Pharaohs, and exposing our sacred remains to the vulgar gaze of gaping and ignorant sight-seers. But a judgment will be upon the heads of those who in the name of historical research commit this sacrilege.' Then he proceeded to tell me where the remains of the mortal body of this our present incarnation will lie. . . ."

"Where?" The three listeners spoke in one breath.

"Where do you think? Guess." He looked at them interrogatively, compellingly.

"In Egypt again?" hazarded Wroxham.

"In Wales?" This from Patricia.

"At Wigan," suggested Miss Ruggles.

"At Wigan!" Mr. Pennant was greatly incensed. "Now why should I be at Wigan?"

"Why shouldn't you?" returned Miss Ruggles stoutly. "You might be in a railway accident there; the train in which you were travelling might have a

fearful collision at Wigan and you be cut to pieces. I've heard of funnier, I mean stranger, things happening."

"You are all wrong. I am born to be——"

"Not hanged?" cried Patricia.

"Drowned. I am to be drowned off the Isle of Man, and my remains will lie at the bottom of the sea in longitude $4^{\circ} 31'$, and latitude $54^{\circ} 15'$." He relapsed into gloom. The figures of the blue-faced clock came out and struck the hour—five o'clock. The head waiter of Dandolo's, with a look, and a suggestive flicking of crumbs from their marble-topped table, made it apparent that this same table, which was in the best position on the Piazza, had been occupied long enough by the English visitors unless a further supply of tea and coffee was ordered. The Hoaxe, replete with almond cakes and milk, stretched himself on the warm pavement; Miss Ruggles and Patricia and Wroxham gazed thoughtfully at the multicoloured mosaics of St. Mark's glinting and sparkling in the sunshine, at the bronze horses pawing the air, at the granite columns and the winged lion, at the gaily-dressed cosmopolitan crowd and the soft-hued pigeons pecking and preening and strutting about the chequered flags. It was, with its glorious and fantastic array of domes and columns, buttresses and arches, waving flags and statues, a charming and animated scene, and the delight of it all was reflected on their faces.

"I should never go to the Isle of Man," said Patricia, returning to Mr. Pennant with an effort. "I should

never move a foot off dry land for the remainder of my life; then you cannot be drowned."

"How am I to return to England?" he asked.

"You might perhaps just risk the Channel," observed Miss Ruggles; "but afterwards——"

"But I'd as soon be drowned as experience death by disease," said he. "Drowning is, I believe, a glorious death."

"Oh, well," said Miss Ruggles, "that's all right, die your own way. Don't you think,"—to Wroxham—"oh, cicerone! if we are to see the *Ponte del Paradiso* to-day, we ought to adjourn this meeting? Let us find our gondola. Coming, Mr. Pennant?"

He shook his head in the negative. "I'm going to see an old friend of mine, a worker in brass, who has but one leg and is a philosopher and thinker. Come, Hoaxe. This man, whose intelligence is rare, will bring us great comfort."

Miss Ruggles laughed. "You have not yet told us your reason for coming to Venice and to 'Casa Ferolico.'"

"For two reasons," the little man replied. "I missed you"—he mused for a moment, as one does at the sudden discovery of a fact—"and a woman, a tall, gaunt woman, arrived who'd designs on my soul. She'd a voice like a booming bell, and was always referring to her happiness. I can stand depressed Christians, and muscular Christians, but not the happy, bright ones. One day she ran me to earth in the pine wood on the Ridge, where I'd hidden, and her first remark was,

gazing upwards, that it reminded her of cathedral aisles. She fortunately swallowed a fly as she pronounced the words and choked. It was luck for me. Ladies, farewell till dinner." He raised his hat, nodded to Wroxham, and disappeared along the Merceria.

CHAPTER XXIII

A DISCOURSE ON POST IMPRESSIONISM; AND WROXHAM IS GUILTY OF CARELESSNESS

THE two days following were wet. The rain descended in sheets and the blossom of the fruit-trees in the orchard behind "Casa Ferolico" was swept away like drifting snow to the lagoon, where it fluttered, pale and stricken, for one brief moment on the swirling waters before being swallowed up. It was cold, too, and the visitors crouched around the big stove, holding chilled hands and feet to the grateful warmth. For one whole morning our party remained indoors and made friends with Mr. Sheepshanks and his satellites and the Frenchman and his two pretty and demure nieces.

The sketching party was chaperoned by a Mrs. Japp, with bright, snappy eyes and a bright, snappy manner; brisk, efficient and kind-hearted, she admirably fulfilled the rôle she had undertaken, whilst in her off times she rushed round Venice and saw the sights. Indeed, by reason of her briskness she saw more sights in a week than the average English traveller does in a month. She talked familiarly of the Frari, the Accademia, the dear Salute; she extolled the genius of Bellini and Cima, though up to a fortnight ago, when she had begun to study guide-books, she had not so much as heard of their names. Titian she dismissed with a single word,

"Inspired" (she had examined the "Assumption" for exactly half a minute); she strongly doubted the authenticity of a supposed Veronese, and declared the "St. Barbara," by Palma Vecchio, in the Church of Santa Maria Formosa, to be the most glorious painting in the world (this she had viewed for a full quarter of a minute, and on being questioned as to her opinion of the saints on either side—Sebastian and Anthony, John the Baptist and Dominic—she was forced to admit she hadn't seen them). But she was a pleasant little lady; shepherded her flock with tact; showed no partiality for the sketches produced by her own daughter—a slow, heavy girl, with large feet and mournful eyes—whatever she may have privately thought of them; fastened all the girls' blouses up the back each morning, and saw that Major Piggott's hot-water bottle was filled each night.

It was her suggestion that the sketches, the fruit of each day's labour, should be exhibited at night after dinner at the end of the *salon*, and viewed and judged by herself and Mr. Sheepshanks. She knew no more about Art than did our friend Patricia; but, like Patricia, she thought she did, and her comments on the efforts of the painstaking students were not only amusing and embarrassing, but always stimulating.

On the evening of the first wet day she succeeded in drawing Miss Ruggles, Patricia, Mr. Pennant and Wroxham (she was a very friendly lady) into the group standing in front of a painting by a Mr. Bean, one of two pimply youths, which was pinned against the wall,

and playfully suggested that they should give their assistance to her and Mr. Sheepshanks in judging it.

"Criticism is so good for our dear students' souls, isn't it?" she cried briskly, addressing the little group. "You all appreciate the interest of strangers, who, I hope, will soon be our friends" (archly to Miss Ruggles and the rest of her party), "don't you?" She did not hear the "damnation" muttered beneath his breath by a rubicund gentleman in spectacles, of the name of Parrot, but Patricia did, and laughed softly to herself. "We take each picture in turn. Mr. Sheepshanks will now tell us what he thinks of this clever sketch by Mr. Bean—my poor opinion is, of course, worthless—he will mention its bad, its weak points, if such exist" (this very pleasantly and encouragingly to Mr. Bean), "and he will, with unerring judgment, seize upon its good points."

Mr. Sheepshanks, after this introduction, now took the floor. His woolly coat had been exchanged for a velvet one, and with his low, turned-down collar, loosely-knotted scarf and long, shaggy hair, he could not have been mistaken for anything but an artist. He talked well and fluently; had all the jargon of Art at his finger-ends, and was cute enough to know that when he spoke of values, tones, half-lights, his pupils were immensely impressed.

As an artist he was a failure, and he knew it; commercially, he was becoming a success. Before leaving England he had gathered his students together and conducted them to an exhibition of "pictures?" by the

most advanced exponents of Post Impressionism. It was a clever move; he knew that his pupils would instantly be desirous of doing what these had done; moreover, could, and would possibly surpass them in their wildest efforts. He did not say to them: "It is quite easy to make a picture like one of these; here is the formula: Take a good brushful of any coloured paint you may fancy—orange for choice; close your eyes, smear it over your canvas in the shape of a hill, and that will be a haycock. Open your eyes, take a brushful of black paint, smear this over the top of your canvas, and you've got your sky—black skies being the rage at the moment—doesn't matter whether your eyes are open or shut for this operation, you can't go wrong. Next, with a brushful of vermilion, hammer in your sea at the base of the picture, vermilion seas having quite cut blue ones out. Your haycock will now be resting on the water. If you want anything else, you might throw in a tall pink chimney of a factory, this placed to the left of your picture opposite to the haycock will give it cohesion and pull the thing together. Sign it with initials that might be a spiral staircase or an obese cockroach, mark it fifty guineas, and the thing is done."

No, he did not say any of this, he was desirous of putting their intelligence to the test and seeing if they could find out for themselves how it was done. Besides, being a poor man, he was anxious to conduct them to Venice and make a little money out of them. For years he had been painting quite good pictures and nobody

wanted them. He would not stoop to paint bad pictures because the public did want them; but he was willing to assist his pupils to paint them.

Now, striking an attitude, he gazed straight before him, with amazement written on his face, an amazement that seemed to say: "Is it possible that one of my pupils could have achieved this?" (and he was amazed). Mr. Bean had surpassed all the others' most daring and realistic efforts. It was as though an octopus, recently immersed in flame-coloured paint, had been crawling across the canvas, and, half-way, had paused to rest whilst gently oscillating its numerous tentacles. Mr. Sheepshanks did not inquire, "What *is* this?" He was trying to keep his head, the confused wavy lines made him giddy.

Patricia and Miss Ruggles had sunk into arm-chairs, eyes round with amazement. At first they had been inclined to think the whole thing was a joke; then, seeing that the students were standing full of solemn appreciation while Mrs. Japp was enunciating "Most daring!" "Astonishingly clever!" "Original almost to the verge of eccentricity!" like so many staccato pin-pricks, they saw they must not laugh, that they must treat the subject in deadly earnest or go away. They preferred staying, for, as Patricia afterwards said, it was quite unique in the way of impromptu entertainments, and one of the most amusing she had ever witnessed. "Besides, being free of charge," Miss Ruggles had responded.

"I think," said Mr. Sheepshanks, tugging at his

beard, and with his head at the angle which usually denotes extreme concentration of thought when a subject is under consideration, "that—that you have surpassed yourself, Mr. Bean. This, well—this *is* a picture!" That there had been any doubt of this in Mr. Sheepshanks' mind no one would have guessed. "But it's a little, just a tiny bit flat." He withdrew further from the canvas and studied it with knitted brow. "The colour is good, most intense. The form . . . well, as we know, the form doesn't really matter; but it wants bringing out. You take my meaning?"

Mr. Bean, with folded arms and one lock of black hair tumbling down to a frowning left eyebrow, seemed slightly uncertain that he did, but Mrs. Japp, with her customary brightness, jumped at it at once. "You are quite right," she exclaimed, "isn't he, Mr. Bean? A background is needed; a mountain, for instance." She looked interrogatively, with snapping, intelligent eyes, at Mr. Sheepshanks.

"Well—I had thought of a windmill," replied Mr. Sheepshanks, imitating Mr. Bean's attitude and folding his arms.

Mr. Bean shook his head. A windmill he *could* not accept. If he put in a windmill, the public would imagine his foreground was wheat.

"I see," said Mrs. Japp; "that would never do."

Patricia felt she was going to scream and clutched the sides of her chair.

There was silence for an interval.

"I've got it," cried Mr. Bean, flinging back the lock

from his forehead as though wishful of releasing a brilliant idea from bondage. "A fire escape!"

"Ah!" murmured Mr. Sheepshanks.

"A white one—not too definite in form."

"Exactly," agreed Mrs. Japp.

"Go on, Mr. Bean, as you are doing," pronounced Mr. Sheepshanks, "and the world will live to hear of you."

Mr. Bean's laugh, as he removed his inchoate octopus from the wall, was not good to hear, for it was one of cynical scorn. Long ago he had become indifferent to the opinion of the world as all young men are. He worked only for his mistress Art, which was another name for truth.

"And now, Miss Twogood?"

Miss Twogood usually followed Mr. Bean. She was a quite nice-looking girl, if only she would have refrained from wearing a pugaree along with barbaric gold hoop earrings—a pugaree should be worn in conjunction with eyeglasses, prominent teeth, a panama hat and a Baedeker. With barbaric earrings it is wasted, thrown away; it is not artistic; it is unnatural; it is wrong.

This evening, the pugaree being absent, Miss Twogood, with heavy masses of hair banded above the earrings; in a shapeless green velvet, trailly, twiny gown, low, turned-down collar, and suède slippers wore exactly the appearance one might have reasonably expected from the artist of the sketch now pinned up against the wall, and bearing the title of: "The Head of a

Venetian Child." Beneath his breath Mr. Pennant growled, "'The head on a tankard of ale,'" and in truth it as much resembled that as it resembled anything in this world. Perhaps a soap-bubble, a heavy heliotrope-coloured soap-bubble, would have been nearer the mark, floating away into nebulous space. The foreground might have been intended to represent an earthquake, knives and forks, or a naval engagement. "It had a bloody look somewhere," said Mr. Pennant, who was rapidly working himself up into a temper. "Oh, and 'the head of a child,' is really a German airship, the occupants of which are taking snap-shot photographs," he whispered to Miss Ruggles, who frowned on him severely.

Mr. Sheepshanks made suitable, encouraging and adulatory comments to Miss Twogood, punctuated by clever, stimulating little suggestions from Mrs. Japp; and when Miss Twogood, strengthened and refreshed, removed her picture and held it to her breast in a careless attitude, she saw before her, in a succession of beautiful visions: a one-man show in Bond Street, a one-man exhibition at the Grafton Galleries, a group of well-selected canvases at the Tate, and finally, permanence among the immortals at the National Gallery. Happy Miss Twogood.

Mr. Parrot, the rubicund, spectacled gentleman, and Miss Marsh, the well-dressed girl, had indubitably done the most unsatisfactory and unoriginal work from the rest of the students' point of view, inasmuch as it was quite easy to distinguish what they had intended to

portray. For example, Mr. Parrot had painted a gondola and a bridge, and by no effort of the imagination could one have been mistaken for the other, and Miss Marsh had attempted the Salute against a lowering grey sky—the day being wet—and the result of her efforts was a genuine church, and not a wheelbarrow or the plan of a garden city. Our party would have liked to express its approbation, but dared not.

When all had been judged and their brilliant creators were grouped around the stove, shedding inspired pearls of wisdom and thought, Mr. Sheepshanks, with a little sigh, turned to Wroxham, in whom he had descried a man of sympathy, and asked him if he were interested in Art.

“Yes,” replied Wroxham, offering cigarettes to him and Mr. Pennant. “Won’t you join us for a little while?” he added courteously. “I’m sure my friends will be pleased.” He felt sorry for this poor, tired, woolly man, who probably longed, in his secret heart, to kill off all his pupils and enjoy a little painting on his own account, and who acted the part he had undertaken so well and courageously, possibly for the sake of wife and children at home. Wroxham had sensed his positive nausea at some of the sketches.

“Thank you very much.” Mr. Sheepshanks dropped into a chair to which Miss Ruggles had kindly motioned him. “What,” he turned to her, “do you really think of the sketches you have just seen?”

The question was abrupt. Mr. Sheepshanks was

tired. Finesse he reserved for his pupils only; there was none left over for anybody else.

Miss Ruggles hesitated and Mr. Pennant rushed into the breach. "What do we think? Of all the putrid, mad, hideous, chaotic abortions——"

"Hsh!" Miss Ruggles and Patricia were really annoyed; the little man was quite forgetting himself.

"I beg pardon," he said. "I'm sorry; I get worked up."

"Don't apologize." Mr. Sheepshanks actually laughed from pleasure. "I quite agree with every word you say—'mad, chaotic, hideous.'" He nodded his head with approval after each adjective.

"But why——?"

"Bread and butter," he replied curtly. "It's the new craze and is remunerative. I can't afford to be true to myself and my beliefs. . . . Good art doesn't pay. The public, the jaded, worn-out public, wants a new sensation, and must have it. It must have something that will hit it in the face, scream at it, knock it flat, confuse its mind, make it wonder if it's suffering from an optical delusion or delirium tremens; and these post-impressionists have been clever enough and immoral enough to pander to its tastes. Really they are laughing up their sleeves, but the great and asinine B. P., out of its abysmal ignorance, doesn't know it. 'So daring!' 'So outrageously clever!' it cries. I actually heard a woman say at the Grafton Galleries: 'I feel as though I were experiencing a succession of nightmares or listening to a string of new and original oaths, and

it's perfectly delicious, so maddeningly exciting!' She straightway purchased a picture by a rising man named Le Page—it's Page really, but he'd sufficient acumen to tack on the Le. He'll go far before the B. P. gets tired and demands a new sensation. His picture represented a mountain, nothing else, and it looked like an adipose pumpkin, composed of beef suet interstreaked with blood."

"And what about the critics?" inquired Wroxham, glancing at Patricia to see if she were bored, and her eager, laughing eyes told him more plainly than words how great was her interest.

Mr. Sheepshanks, who had been simply vehement up to now, became almost alarmingly violent. He not only clawed his beard, rumbled up his shaggy hair and bit at his moustache, but thumped the arms of his chair till the dust flew. "Oh, don't," he groaned; "they're the worst of the lot, worse than either the artists or the public, for they're cowards. The others at least are courageous, but the critics are arrant cowards. They follow each other like a flock of sheep, none of them dare speak out; they are afraid they may miss a genius in embryo, so they tread cautiously. Once they pilloried a great artist who shall be nameless. He was unusual; he did not embrace the then accepted tenets of Art, he struck out for himself, his work was strong, virile, original. They slaughtered him hip and thigh. Afterwards, when the B. P. had for itself—oh, astonishing and marvellous and unheard-of miracle!—discovered the genius of this man, when he was at his zenith—a

bright and radiant and lonely star in a firmament of hopeless mediocrity—the critics were forced to eat their words, and it was an unpleasant and unpalatable and highly-indigestible meal. They have never forgotten their lesson; now, tentatively, guardedly, in a language so obscure as to be almost unintelligible, they write their little innocuous criticisms—standing on secure and neutral ground—and no one is either a penny the worse or the better. I am earning my livelihood by what, to me, are dishonest means. I am encouraging this monstrous prostitution of Art, but at least I've the grace to know and admit it. I . . .” He broke off; he was exhausted by his own violence and ashamed that he should have so let himself go to these kindly strangers. “I—I'm sorry,” he smiled. He had, they saw, a peculiarly winning smile, and it somehow touched them.

“You can't think how we've enjoyed all that you have told us. . . .” Miss Ruggles looked at the others for confirmation of her words.

“Indeed we have,” said Wroxham earnestly. “I, in a small way, have followed this movement with some interest, and I agree most emphatically with all that you have said; but, thank God! we've one or two men left to us who have kept their heads and are doing really fine work.”

“We have. I——” Mr. Sheepshanks paused and extracted from a voluminous side pocket a roll of paper, “would like to show you this, if I may. It has helped me through two or three bad days just to know that

somewhere in the universe a man exists who can paint like this. It is but a sketch, and I found it here—here in this very room, on that side table behind the large copper pot. How long it has lain there I do not know, neither does the Signorina—I have questioned her. It is unsigned, but that it is a work of genius I have no hesitation in saying, and I think you will agree with me.” With reverent fingers he unfolded it, flattened it out on a table and bade them look.

At sight of it Wroxham gave a violent start and, with immense difficulty, checked an exclamation from escaping him—it was a sketch of his own, a small water-colour he had achieved the day after his arrival in Venice, and which he must have dropped unknowingly as he crossed the *salon*. He cursed himself now for his carelessness and glanced affrightedly at the others, but they were all busy with the little painting; only Miss Ruggles had seen his start, but she quickly averted her eyes, and, like the wise woman she was, kept her own counsel.

It was undoubtedly a perfect bit of work, so simple, so dainty, so slight, yet of Heaven-born inspiration: just a gondola floating as it were in a mirage between sky and water above a lagoon. In it was a single figure, that of a boy, naked, poised for a dive, grace in every line, symmetry, daring, abandon, youth incarnate—that was all.

“I know of only one other man who could have painted that,” said Mr. Sheepshanks.

“And he?”

"Is Wraysbury—David Wraysbury."

There was silence as the little group again turned their eyes to the sketch. Then, with a muttered excuse of having no more cigarettes, Wroxham strode from the room.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE ISLAND OF ST. FRANCESCO DEL DESERTO

IN the lagoon some miles to the north-east of Venice is a little lonely island that seems to float in a mysterious magical atmosphere 'twixt sea and sky. It is strangely attractive, with its umbrella pines all in a row, and magnificent mournful cypresses; and over it seems to brood a hushed and solemn silence, for is it not the Sanctuary of the Monastery of St. Francesco del Deserto? And was it not here that the sweet and gentle St. Francis landed on his way to Venice and reproved the birds for singing while he prayed? Around the spot where he had knelt, a little church and monastery were built, and here for seven centuries a small Franciscan brotherhood has dwelt; twenty or thirty monks now pass their peaceful and untroubled lives upon the peaceful and charming little island, and it was here that Wroxham asked Patricia to be his wife.

It happened thus: After forty-eight hours of rain, followed by three or four days of wind and quite chilly weather, a morning dawned of such surpassing loveliness, that Miss Ruggles intimated that she for one had no intention of spending it anywhere but beneath the blue of Heaven.

"Let us, then," said Wroxham, "go for a day among

the lagoons." So they went—the four of them accompanied by Pietro and the Hoaxe.

It was, indeed, a day of rare beauty. When they had emerged from the narrow canal at the Fondamenta Nuove, and were in the open lagoon, with its wide, still peace and hint of the sea near by; with its islands and villages scattered like jewels on its placid surface; with its picturesque posts marking the channel that boats must take if they wished not to run aground, a silence for a time fell upon them; for a boat-funeral was making its way to the cemetery on the island of St. Michele.

"And yet it does not seem so sad as a funeral in a city," said Patricia thoughtfully, after a while.

Miss Ruggles nodded her head. "The noise of great towns, the hurry, the racket . . . but here nothing but peace, the gentle sound of gondolas moving through water, the sighing of wind in the reeds . . . the sky and that line of blue mountains in the distance——"

"You can hardly tell which is which," objected Mr. Pennant.

"That is where the beauty lies," said Patricia; "sky, mountains, the low fringe of mainland and water—all merging one into another as softly and imperceptibly as wakefulness merges into unconsciousness."

And Wroxham said nothing. He sat by Patricia in the bow, facing Pietro, who, with strong and rhythmic movement of his sinuous body and arms, propelled the boat through the burnished water so evenly and smoothly as scarcely to make a ripple. The hem of her

gown touched him, so did her arm; once even the brim of her hat, as she turned about to look at a little white-sailed boat which was becalmed, and for which she laughingly apologised. "I'm afraid it's rather large," said she; "but the sun is warm and parasols are a nuisance in a boat;" and still he did not speak. She looked at him curiously, a little surprised, but as quickly looked away again, fixing her eyes upon the little becalmed boat with an interest it scarcely warranted.

Miss Ruggles, who with Mr. Pennant and the Hoaxe sat in the stern of the gondola, smiled to herself. "He will speak to-day, he cannot hold out another minute, and he's debating how he will make the opportunity. He's afraid we're going to hang on to him like leeches. Bless the man! I'll help him." And she did.

It was after lunch. They had skipped Murano, none of them feeling in a mood for factories, even though of Venetian glass; they had "done" Torcello, with its air of mournfulness and general dilapidation and desolation, and were now arrived at Del Deserto. Miss Ruggles was sleeping in the shade of an umbrella pine (this was her method of helping Wroxham), and not only did she sleep herself, but she had insisted upon Mr. Pennant sleeping.

"You can take the next umbrella pine," she said; "our snores will then not disturb one another." She made no suggestions as to what Patricia and Wroxham should do with themselves. "I shan't wake up till four

o'clock," she had announced; "then it will be time for tea."

So Wroxham had led Patricia away to another umbrella pine, as far removed from Miss Ruggles, Pen-nant and the Hoaxe as was possible without tumbling off the island. Pietro was slumbering in the gondola, which was moored in a little narrow creek; a monk could be seen in the distance, through an opening in a yew hedge, pacing up and down the monastery garden. Two o'clock had just struck from the clock of the church. Wroxham had a couple of hours in which to ask Patricia to marry him, but he apparently found this no easy matter.

To begin with, he was quite distressingly nervous, as all nice men are when they are hopelessly in love and a little uncertain of the feelings of the girl they want to marry, and he was very uncertain of Patricia; for after the manner of her sex when worried as to whether a man really is or is not in love with them, she had blown hot and cold in most perplexing and harassing fashion during these last few days, and sometimes to such an extent that Wroxham at times did not know whether he was standing on his head or his heels. Now she would insist upon talking, as he had never yet heard her talk; indeed, she chattered like a magpie, never giving him a chance to get in a word edgeways, answering her own questions, arguing with her own propositions, laughing at her own sallies. She talked brightly and interestingly and well, as Wroxham was forced to admit. She was gay and amusing, but, strange to say,

he was not interested in her conversation; he puffed at his old pipe gloomily, almost irritably; what he wanted to do was to talk himself.

At length he broke in upon her fluidity—abruptly and with a voice raised above hers: “I feel like the good St. Francis . . .”

“Oh!” said she, surprised.

“I want to reprove you for chattering so much.”

“Really?” she began loftily. “I’m sorry . . .”

“No, you’re not,” said he; “you’re doing it on purpose. You’re making time because . . . because you must know, you must guess, that I want to talk to you, to say something, if only you’ll give me a chance, and . . . and at any moment they might wake up . . .” (he cast an anxious, a testy glance at the recumbent figures in the distance) “and they have so bothered me, been so in the way, and now at last, when my chance has come, you will . . . well, you will go and talk about things like Franciscan brotherhoods—and oh, Patricia, I—and I don’t want to talk about Franciscan brotherhoods. I—I think a Franciscan brother is a crass idiot——”

“Why?” inquired Patricia demurely.

“To go vowing celibacy when—when the world contains women such as you—fine, sweet, adorable. . . . Oh, I can’t say any more. You know that I love you, you must know, or else you’ve been very blind. If you pretend you don’t know, you must be . . . you must be——” Wroxham was working himself up into quite a temper now.

"I must be——?"

"Very stupid," he pronounced.

She laughed softly.

"Don't laugh," he commanded, suddenly bending forward and seizing both her hands; "it—it is no laughing matter. I want you to be my wife, Patricia; will you? I love you with my whole heart and soul. I have loved you from the moment I saw you at Victoria Station, and you announced that you looked like a balloon. Yes, you start." He smiled at her whimsically. "I heard you. Your voice attracted me. I got out of my own compartment to look at the owner of that voice and—that was sufficient. Patricia, won't you look up and say that you love me as I love you—no, you couldn't do that; but that you love me a little, and if you do, say it quickly in Heaven's name, for—I'm at the end of my tether."

"I——"

"Yes——?" he prompted.

"It——"

"It——?" he repeated, trying to look into her downcast eyes.

"Oh!" she cried, "I—I can't say it, it is so difficult."

"Well, don't," said he. "Why should you? Instead I'll kiss you. . . . May I, Patricia——?"

She never knew if she said yes, she always declares she didn't; but the next moment she was in his arms, his lips were on hers, her heart against his, and he in

a murmured confusion of words was pouring into her ear all his pent-up love of the last few weeks.

At last, breathless, she pushed him away. "Think of the Brother over there in the garden! He must have seen us."

"I don't care if thirty Brothers were to stand all in a row and stare at us till their eyes dropped out. Sweetheart, can it be true?"

"What?"

"That you love me?"

"I haven't said so."

"Well, that you are going to marry me?"

"I haven't said that, either."

"Quibbler! Put it, then, that I am the only man who from this blessed moment will be allowed to kiss you."

"You took French leave."

He knelt in front of her, absorbing her with his eyes.

"Patricia, if you look at me like that I shall be obliged to do it again."

"Hush!" said she; "they are waking up."

They announced their great news at the end of the homeward journey.

"Of course imagining we haven't known since four o'clock this afternoon," said Miss Ruggles quaintly, "and it's now close on eight."

"Dear me!" said Wroxham in surprise. "How could you?"

"How couldn't we?" chuckled Miss Ruggles.

"I didn't guess," volunteered Mr. Pennant.

"You're just a man," retorted Miss Ruggles with fine scorn.

"Sometimes—I only throw it out as a suggestion—people congratulate one," observed Wroxham.

"I congratulate *you* with all my heart," cried Mr. Pennant, "and there's my hand on it."

"And I echo your sentiment to Patricia—I shall call you Patricia, now you're going to be married; you will need sympathetic mothering." Miss Ruggles bent across and kissed the girl with warm affection.

"But there's something wrong here," said Wroxham, taking Patricia's hand and holding it in a most public and barefaced manner. "You've each congratulated one of us, don't you congratulate us jointly?"

"I can't," said Mr. Pennant, "till I've known you better." He looked apologetically at Patricia. "I've not known Mr. Wroxham very long, and I'm a cautious man."

"You've known him as long as I, or nearly as long." Patricia corrected herself.

"But women are always rash," said Mr. Pennant, with a sigh.

Pietro drew up softly at the steps of the quay, and, alighting, they entered "Casa Ferolico," a happy, laughing party.

CHAPTER XXV

MISS RUGGLES ON THE SUBJECT OF MARRIAGE

A FEW hours later Miss Ruggles, entering Patricia's bedroom, found the girl in a white dressing-gown, her feet in white woolly shoes, her bright hair streaming over her shoulders, seated in front of the dressing-table, with a photograph propped up before her.

"What, does he carry his portrait about with him, in readiness to present to any stray girl with whom he may happen to fall in love?" queried Miss Ruggles teasingly.

"It is my father," said Patricia quietly. "I am telling him about David. I think they would have liked each other." She handed the photograph to Miss Ruggles to examine.

"Thank you. It is a strong and a fine face."

"And he was a strong and a fine man," said Patricia. There was a hint of tears in her voice. She badly wanted the parent she had loved so well to-night to tell him of her happiness, to ask his blessing. She knew that her David would have been a man after his own heart.

"Are you happy?" asked Miss Ruggles, smoothing the girl's hair with gentle hand. "But I know you are. I, too, am rather radiant at the moment—I came to tell you about it—radiant and yet unhappy."

"Mr. Pennant . . ." excitedly Patricia sprang to

her feet—"he has asked you to marry him? It's in the air."

Miss Ruggles nodded.

"Oh, I am glad. I knew, I guessed that he had followed you here, and he does so want looking after, poor little man——"

"That is just the sad part; that is why I am sorry and in a sense unhappy. . . ."

Patricia looked at her in bewilderment.

"I have sent him away. I have refused him."

"You have refused him? You don't care for him?"

"I care for him too well to marry him."

Patricia sat down and mechanically began to brush out her hair. "It is too difficult for me," she said.

"Do you know how old Mr. Pennant is? He is forty and looks thirty-five, and I am fifty and look every day of my age."

"Bah!" said Patricia; "that is nothing." Her scorn was tremendous.

"Would you marry David Wroxham if he were ten years younger than you?"

Patricia pointed out that she couldn't, as it would reduce him to the age of fifteen, and the law wouldn't permit it.

"Don't quibble," commanded Miss Ruggles sternly. "Would you if you were fifty and he were forty?"

"Yes," said Patricia stoutly. "What does age matter when two people love?"

"Then you'd be a fool," pronounced Miss Ruggles.

"Not such a great one as you. Now listen. I'm

going to be the candid friend, which means I'm going to say straight and personal and offensive things, after the pleasant manner of candid friends." Patricia left the dressing-table, and in her earnestness knelt on the floor in front of Miss Ruggles. "Mr. Pennant has not proposed to you for your youth?"

"No."

"Nor for your—beauty?"

"No." Miss Ruggles smiled.

"Nor for your wealth?"

"No."

"Nor for your fame, position, renown?"

"No."

"Well, then, what has he proposed to you for?"

"I can't imagine, unless he has faint remembrances of Tatum-Khipa, and is lonely without her."

"Don't be flippant. It is unworthy of you. He has proposed to you for your own beautiful nature, for your own dear, warm-hearted, honest self, and for nothing else. He wants your kindness, your sympathy, your affection. He never thinks of a mere trifle like the disparity of age. He is not the sort of man to worry about such matters. I don't suppose he has ever given it a thought, and has no idea if you are thirty or fifty."

"He would know if I married him."

"He would only know he was the happiest man in the world," said Patricia earnestly.

"I am not strong enough."

"What do you mean?"

"Strong enough mentally and morally to remain—old. For his sake, I might try to be young, and make myself a pitiful and ridiculous object. I might begin to massage my wrinkles, dye my hair, wear white gowns, adopt the manners of a young girl, become a laughing-stock in the eyes of the world."

"But you wouldn't be so foolish."

"I might. The most sensible woman in the world will become weak when she's fond of a man."

"Then you *are* fond of him?"

"In a sense, yes. He wants looking after. He wants checking in this wild Egyptian business; he'll go 'off it' if somebody doesn't take him in hand pretty quickly. And he has the tenderest heart—for years he has looked after a poor blind sister with unceasing devotion. This is the only holiday away from her he allows himself in the year. If he goes to Egypt she will go too. She is with a relative now, and it nearly breaks her heart that, owing to her affliction, she cannot look after a little home for him, which they could afford, and are obliged to live in rooms, which he hates. . . ."

"And yet you are not willing to go and look after this home for them?" asked Patricia. "Think of the happiness you could bring to them."

"I don't want to worry round after other people's happiness. I want to be happy myself," said Miss Ruggles, with a grim smile.

"That I don't believe. Your own happiness, from what I know of you, would always come last."

"Oh, don't go and make me out a saint, for I'm as

human as any other woman. I had an unhappy youth; I have arrived at a placid middle-age; I don't want the placidity of my existence upheaved by a wild, eccentric man who would suddenly dash me off to Egypt, expect me to tear across burning deserts with him, and then, if I faltered by the wayside, reproach me for my years."

"No man but a brute would do that," said Patricia indignantly.

"A man could be very cruel to a woman older than himself; in fact, marriage at any time and under the most favourable conditions, is one of the most difficult institutions to support that has yet been created by man."

Patricia stared at her. "I thought you were a believer in it. I imagined you were sorry you had missed it."

"And so I am." Miss Ruggles got up and walked about the room. "I have cried my eyes out about it many a time. I have hungered for home, husband, children. But—it has come too late. I am happy to-night, proud, flattered that I have not altogether been passed by"—her face softened to a wistfulness that almost made it beautiful, and Patricia felt the tears start to her eyes—"but it has come too late. As I say, I have settled down to a placid and comfortable middle-age. I can let down my thin grey hair at night and plait it into a wispy tail without worrying about its being seen. I can tie my head up in a scarlet shawl when I have a cold, and wear square-toed shoes and have a big waist, and wear brown alpaca dresses of an obsq-

lete make and goloshes and queer-shaped hats skewered to my head; and none of these things could I have or do if I possessed a husband."

"But you would have the husband," argued Patricia. "Surely a nice husband would be worth the sacrifice of a scarlet shawl and a skewered-down hat?"

"I don't know," said Miss Ruggles; "no, I don't think he would, and I'm too old for the strain of any man, especially a man like Mr. Pennant. To begin with, I should have to be perpetually on the watch to keep him away from the Isle of Man; I shouldn't want my husband to be drowned. That would be wearing. Then, at any minute he might imagine himself to be his former self, Amen-Hotep IV., and become annoyed if I failed to address him as 'Mighty Bull.' . . ." She paused, and stooping down to Patricia, who still knelt on the floor, kissed her good-night. "It is no good discussing the matter further. I've quite settled not to be Mrs. Pennant; some other and younger woman must take him on."

"I'm sorry," sighed Patricia, "very sorry. I believe you would have made him very happy."

"But don't I tell you I want to be happy myself," said Miss Ruggles sharply, as she opened the door. She paused for a moment; then half turning round, she added softly: "Had I been able to give him a child I might have considered it, but as it is . . ." She broke off abruptly, and Patricia saw that her eyes were full of tears as she passed out of the room and closed the door behind her.

CHAPTER XXVI

PATRICIA FALLS INTO GRIEVOUS ERROR

THEY were down in the orchard seated beneath an ancient fig-tree, whose smooth, grey branches twisted and interlaced like the coils of a serpent and whose newly-opened leaves, cup-shaped, were of the most tender and exquisite green.

Patricia, on a rug, sat with her back against the venerable trunk; the sunshine straying through the interstices of the dainty emerald cups wove patterns of light on her gown of white batiste, and flecked loosened tendrils of her hair with splashes of brightness. Wroxham, without a hat, was stretched to his full, lazy length at her feet. He looked supremely happy, and he felt it. They had been engaged for nearly a week, and each day he had told himself he had discovered some fresh and unexpected charm and delight in Patricia. To begin with, she had not yet revealed to him the fact that she was rich, and not poor; important in her own little world, and not obscure and unknown as she would have him believe. Still she played her part. Still she practised her little economies, and with head on one side, a frown between her pretty, level eyebrows, and a tremendous air of concentration, would debate whether she could afford to do this or that, run to half the expense

of a gondola for the day, or lunch at an extravagantly-priced hotel on the Grand Canal. She absolutely refused to allow Wroxham to pay anything for her beyond the merest trifles; a cup of tea on the Piazza she would accept, or her passage across the Giudecca on one of the ferry-boats, just, as he well knew, to keep him satisfied and contented; and he had often to conceal a smile behind his hand; and she somehow managed to convey to him the impression that she believed him to be a poor man, though she did not say so in so many words. What she proposed to marry him on she had apparently not bothered her head to consider, and again Wroxham laughed to himself, and loved her all the more for her unpracticability and poor dissembling.

As long as she kept her secret, so long he meant to keep his. There should be mutual confessions, and he looked forward to the moment when he should say: "Sweetheart, you were hard on my poor foreground on the first occasion you saw any of my work, which work—forgive my mentioning it, and deem it not a lack of modesty on my part—not only London, but the World sees fit to acclaim; but I live in hope that a day may come when I shall achieve something that may find favour in your eyes, and I shall work to that end." What would she say? Would she stick to her guns and brazen it out, refusing to be coerced in her likes and dislikes by the opinion of the general public? He hoped that she would; indeed, he believed that she would after what she had just now said to him.

They had been talking of some of the pictures they

had seen during the past week. For an hour or two each day Wroxham had loved to take her to see a Cima or a Tintoretto in one of the churches, St. Barbara, or the St. George and the Dragon series of Carpaccio. He enjoyed her frank and robust criticisms; and that she had no sense or appreciation of what was really good in art was no trouble or disappointment to him. The banal effusiveness of people who *pretended* to know wearied him beyond words; her freshness of outlook came as a draught of pure spring water to his jaded palate. He had positively rejoiced when she had just asked if she *need* like Bellini and Titian better than dear Carpaccio.

"Well, you needn't, but you ought," he replied.

"But Carpaccio is so interesting, his pictures tell such delightful stories, and," her voice dropped on an apologetic note, "one gets a little weary of the Madonna and Child enthroned."

"Think of Bellini's angel-children," he urged.

"Think of the sleeping St. Ursula, with her dear little shoes at the side of her bed."

"It is the human note that appeals to you, not the religious."

"She was dreaming of the lover that was to come," mused Patricia, with her eyes on some violets among the grass at their feet.

"Ah!" said he, looking at her with deep tenderness; "is that why you like it?"

"Oh, no," she flashed. "I admired and loved it, you will recollect, before you asked—before I—I consented

to marry you. The whole of my outlook on life has not changed since that moment."

He was amused at her words. One of Patricia's most engaging and lovable qualities he had discovered during these days of intimate companionship was her complete surrender of self one moment, when he told himself with gratitude that as he loved her, so she loved him, and the next her way of suddenly and unexpectedly barricading herself behind a little wall of pride and reserve—not from coquetry, he knew Patricia was not like that, but as though she were still slightly on the defensive towards him, an attitude which had become almost a habit and which she could not quite forget. Sometimes he wondered, when these moments of keeping him at arm's length came upon her, the cause of them. It was as though she had once been hurt, wounded, and after the manner of "A burnt child dreads the fire," could not forget her pain. Had she ever been treated badly by some blackguard? he would ask himself hotly.

"Besides," ruminated Patricia, "because you and people *say* that Titian and Bellini come first and the 'Assumption' is so magnificent, it does not follow that you and they are correct. I think . . . yes, I'm going to dare to say it, that the 'Assumption' is one of the ugliest pictures I've ever seen—the cloud on which the Madonna is ascending might be composed of granite, and I believe, as Mr. Sheepshanks suggested the other evening, you all follow each other like a flock of sheep . . . If somebody, some great expert, were to come

along and say that the 'Assumption' was not by Titian, you would no longer see the beauty of it. It would be a case of the Velasquez controversy at the National Gallery over again. For years everybody has stood before the 'Venus' in breathless admiration. Suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, comes the doubt of the experts as to its genuineness; the beauty of the picture trembles in the balance; if it is not by the great master, it is worthless and no longer admirable; if it is, it is priceless and lovely. Now, doesn't that strike you as farcical? . . . And I expect you're just like the rest of them." She looked at him with teasing raillery.

"Perhaps I am," he admitted, good-humouredly, "and while we are on the subject—and excuse my appearing egotistical—but as you're such a judge, so discriminating and so unprejudiced in your views on any work of art, or, in this case, we'll call it just a picture, what did you think of the little sketch I made of you? Tell me what you really thought . . . I shan't mind."

"Well," said Patricia, "I think it was pretty; it was so pretty it reminded me of one of Rose Martindale's innocuous pictures to be seen in every shop window and on every suburban drawing-room wall. . . . You know you said you wouldn't mind, dear."

"Oh, I don't mind. Anything else?"

"No, I'm afraid there was nothing else."

"As bad as that!" he said comically, "just pretty and innocuous?"

"I'm afraid so, David."

"Oh, well," said he, "criticism, as Mrs. Japp remarks each evening, 'is so good for our dear students' souls.' I must try and do better work." He pondered for a little while, and once or twice his lips curved in a broad smile. He was plainly amused, and this amusement slightly nettled Patricia. She would have preferred his being more crushed by her adverse remarks on his work.

"Now, that little sketch Mr. Sheepshanks showed us the other evening, what did you think of that?"

"Ah!" said she fervently, "that was beautiful, I thought."

"Now, did you?" he ejaculated. He sat in some amazement, manifestly considering her words.

"Yes," she nodded her head, "it was so powerful, the colouring was glorious, and the boy's face—it has haunted me."

"I wonder," said he, after a while, "whether you would ever be like the others."

"The others. What do you mean?"

"Sheep-like."

"Sheep-like!" Her attitude was cold.

"Base your opinion upon the opinion of others. For instance, if Mr. Sheepshanks had not pronounced the sketch as good, whether you yourself would have discovered its merits—if it possesses any."

Patricia eyed him indignantly. "Have I not just told you that I refuse to like the 'Assumption' because public opinion tells me to like it?"

"Of course," said he, "I forgot."

"If Mr. Sheepshanks had said the sketch was—well, no better than the little one you made of me, I should have been in no respect influenced by his words."

"Of course you wouldn't; I apologise. I am sorry, though, you are so down on that sketch. I—I rather liked it myself."

"Never mind," said she soothingly. "It isn't as though it really mattered. If you had to take your painting seriously, now, it would be another thing; but as it is—just an amusement. . . ." She looked at him so kindly and sympathetically that Wroxham, after resisting an insane desire to yell with laughter, said: "I'm going to kiss you for that."

"You mustn't," she protested quickly; "that man over there in the pergola . . ."

"He's got his back to us, he's busy tying up the vines."

"He's nothing of the kind. Oh" (she was trying to keep him off, her eyes fixed on the man, but he was too strong for her) "when you've quite finished"—her cheeks were hot—she said at length.

"I have now," he returned brazenly, letting her go. "I feel better already."

"It must never happen again," she said severely, "in—in public."

"It will always happen if you wear a frock like that and sit beneath an emerald-green fig-tree and say rude things to me about my attempts at art."

She laughed happily and slipped a cool, slim hand into his. "You're rather nice, David."

"I shall do it again," he said warningly, "if you're not careful. Sweetheart, as—as you are in a kindly and gentle mood, I'm going to confess to you—something I ought perhaps to have told you a week ago, but I waited—well, I waited, for several reasons." He looked down into her eyes, which were raised to his, and wondered how she would take what he was going to say. If she were inclined to be aggrieved, he would turn the tables upon her by suggesting that perhaps she, too, had been suppressing some important facts about her own life. Then, if still sore, he would endeavour to make further amends by telling her of how he had followed her to Mentone, of his reckless destroyal of a ticket to Taormina, of his pursuing her up hill and down dale, of his finding the paper she had dropped in Cook's office, of his race to Venice, and of his settling down at "Casa Ferolico," with what patience he could to await her arrival. Surely such a confession would touch any woman? That he had not made it before, told her everything, from the first moment of their engagement, made her realise and believe that in loving her he loved her with the very best part of his nature, was a mistake and a grievous pity in the light of subsequent events. Yes, it was a pity.

Now she said: "A confession! So have I. I meant to make it this afternoon."

"Did you?" said he. "That is strange."

"Yes," said she. "I hope yours is not very bad—no worse than mine. I could not bear a great deal: an insane wife hidden away in a garret, for instance. No,

I couldn't overlook an insane wife in a garret; I am not of a forgiving disposition."

"It's not quite so bad as that—in fact, you might be pleased about it. Some girls would be, but you're not just an ordinary girl, as I long ago discovered. You're——"

But Patricia was not listening to him. "I think I would like to confess first," she said musingly. "You see, I shall always have to look up to you now."

"That will be very nice if you do it as you are doing now. I had no idea your eyes——"

Swiftly she dropped them. "I cannot confess if you interrupt me."

He expressed penitence and promised not to offend again.

"Well——" She paused, searching for suitable words. "I—I am not really the person you imagine me to be. I have been guilty of play-acting since I came abroad. I am not——"

"Don't say that you are not a single woman," he could not resist interjecting.

She looked at him witheringly. "I am not really poor as I have represented myself to be; I am not without a penny. For certain reasons I have wished to pass myself off as a girl without any means, and you"—her eyes became dreamy—"believed it. And yet you asked me to be your wife . . . and I gather you have not very much money yourself; that you are, in fact, anything but rich; but you want to marry me—me, a poor girl. . . . It is nice of you, David."

His hand closed over hers as it lay in the grass.

"Dear one, how could I help wanting to marry you! Could any man? Have you had many lovers, Patricia?"

"Seven men have proposed to me during the last twelve months besides you." She sniffed at a violet she was holding.

"The deuce they have!" said he.

"But we won't talk about them. You don't seem very surprised that I—am not penniless."

"I'm not; I never believed that you were."

"Why, may I ask?"

"You never looked it."

"Looks! Looks mean nothing. That is just like an ignorant man. Looks!" Her scorn of his observation checked her for a moment. "A girl who is poor doesn't necessarily go about in rags and with holes in her stockings."

"A girl who is poor doesn't look as you look now and always have looked ever since I met you," he returned obstinately.

"We won't argue," said she; "it is useless, and I want to get on with my story if it interests you. . . ."

"It does vastly."

"Well, as I said before, I had several reasons for coming abroad alone and pretending to be poor. Firstly, I wanted to know what it felt like to be hard up. I had always had so much money at my disposal—I am really quite rich—had always done exactly as I liked, and it had begun to pall, and I knew, too, that I

was selfish, horrid and luxurious. So I decided I would try what it was to have to do without things, and I came away for that purpose; I couldn't do it in England, it would have been difficult. I live at Wyfleet Hall, Little Wyfleet, near Burnt Hollow, in Essex. My father was the Patrick Hastings who made a fortune out of tin-tacks, perhaps you have heard of him, and I was his only child. I hope that you don't mind very much"—she was quite apologetic—"and that you are not angry with me."

"Angry with you! Why should I be?"

"Oh, some men who are p——well, not well off, would never propose . . ." She stumbled a little. "What I mean is, wouldn't like to be married to a rich girl . . . would be proud and all that sort of thing . . . I mean, of course, nice men."

"But I knew," said Wroxham.

"You knew?" Patricia sat back and stared at him. "You knew I was not poor?"

He nodded, whilst chuckling softly. "I've known for some days. I've been amused in watching your little economies, your haggling over the price of gondolas, your stinting yourself of cakes at tea on the Piazza. I've seen your white gloves and pretty fripperies hanging out of your bedroom to dry—a wash-day, I guessed, had been in progress. I have wondered with what possession or article of dress you would next part in order to swell your exchequer. Oh, yes, I knew. I also knew who you were, and I've loved you and blessed you for

it." He scarcely noticed that her hand had slipped away from beneath his on the grass.

"How did you know?"

"From a cousin of mine. He had met your cousin, Miss Moffat . . ." and Wroxham proceeded to relate the contents of Dick Charteris' letter almost word for word. "I had always guessed there was some mystery connected with you, but not a mystery such as this. Patricia," the chaffing, teasing note went out of his voice and one of deep tenderness and respect crept into it, "it was a fine thing to do, a jolly plucky thing to do." He took her hands in both of his, holding them closely, and, in his earnestness, he did not notice how limply and unresponsively they lay there. "I can't say I think you did it very well; you are not a clever actress, you are too honest, too transparent"—he smiled at her banteringly—"but—I loved you more than ever for it. I——" But again she was not listening, he suddenly perceived; a curious remoteness, an aloofness, a withdrawing of herself from him and his love seemed to be enfolding her, wrapping her about and leaving him alone, stranded and cold. She had taken her hands from his slowly, but deliberately, and she sat back, it seemed to him, as far away from him as she could get.

"How long have you known this? Did you . . . had you heard from your cousin before we went to the island of Del Deserto?" she asked.

"Why, yes," replied Wroxham unsuspectingly, won-

dering whatever was the matter. "I heard the day after you got here. Wha——"

"You knew I was wealthy before you asked me to be your wife?" The words came out deliberately, evenly, each enunciated with perfect clearness.

"Yes, I tell you." He was looking at her in surprise. She was becoming very white.

"You—a poor man, a man without money, occupation, position . . ." He stared at her in still greater surprise; his brain was working slowly . . . every scrap of colour had now drained away from her face and neck, leaving her as pale as death. Was she going to faint? Impulsively he bent to her. . . . "Don't touch me," she cried; "take away your hands. I cannot bear it. Oh, I cannot bear it." She covered her face with her hands, and for a moment there was silence between them.

"What do you mean?" he demanded at last. "I—I don't understand. . . . I——"

"What do I mean?" Dry sobs shook her from head to foot. "I thought that I had met a man who loved me for myself, for my own poor self; but I find I was mistaken."

Then he understood. The import of her words went home, and he sat as one turned to stone, as white as she. The enormity of her accusation, the insult of it, the cruelty, in these first tense moments did not anger him: it only hurt him—hurt him painfully, inexpressibly. Some day the wound she had dealt him, the hideous, piercing stab, might heal, but the scar would al-

ways remain, that he knew. And Patricia, his Patricia, his dear and beloved girl, had given him this pain, and he had believed that she loved him. . . . There must be a mistake, some terrible mistake. He put out a hand, a vague, wandering hand, as a man who is blind feels for the object he desires; but again she shrank away from him, cowering against the trunk of the tree.

And then the mists began to clear away and his anger to rise. Slowly the blood mounted to his face, cursed again through his veins, even to his eyes, obfuscating his vision momentarily; but with an effort he held himself in hand. He must give her another chance. She had spoken without thinking, without realising the import of her words, the significance of them.

"Patricia"—he tried to smile at her—"what are you saying—why do you shrink away from me? What does all this mean? I . . . I have misunderstood you, surely. You are teasing me . . . there is some hideous mistake——"

"But there isn't." Perhaps if she had looked at him she might have been more merciful. Perhaps her own obsession would have cleared away. Who knows? But, as it was, she gave full rein to her unworthy and degrading suspicions of this man whose wife she had promised to be. . . . "There is no mistake. You have not misunderstood me. My words were meant to imply that I believe you have proposed to me for—my money. It seems a hateful thing to believe . . . but I cannot help it. They have all done it—all the others; you are

only one of many." She spoke with exceeding bitterness and with a hard, strained look on her face. "I ran away from England from them. The last one to propose to me was Antony Elwick, the man to whom your cousin referred, and he was deeply in love with my cousin Mary Moffat. It was an insult to me, it was cruel. Then I cried: 'I will see if it is possible for a man to love me for myself, just myself.' I met you . . . you know the rest; and oh, how happy I was! I hugged my joy to my heart. 'He does not know,' I have whispered to myself over and over again. It seemed too beautiful and wonderful to be true. I gloried in the knowledge that, believing me to be poor, you were willing to work and make a home for me—for me, your poor Patricia—and all the time you knew, you knew . . ." her voice was choked with grief and passion. "You were no better than the rest of them. I was a something to be pursued, hunted, run to earth. Not a girl of flesh and blood, craving for disinterested affection, but merely a machine representing—money."

Her words fell upon him like hail, stinging, cutting, lashing at him. Then he let himself go. Springing to his feet, he seized her by the shoulders; no longer should she shrink away from him. "Look at me!" he thundered; "look me straight in the eyes and repeat those words if you dare." Through her thin white blouse he could feel her soft flesh wince under his grip, but she kept her head up; and even blinded as he was by his passion, he could see, with a terrible sinking at

his heart, that she *believed* what she had said. "Take those words back!"

"No!" said she.

"Then it's good-bye for ever." He released her without another word and left her.

CHAPTER XXVII

PATRICIA TRAVELS ONE WAY; WROXHAM ANOTHER

WROXHAM travelled straight to London, and he went as a man in a trance. His luggage he left behind. Just as he was, without even settling his bill, he left "Casa Ferolico." After paying for his ticket home he had about eleven shillings left in his pocket. Mechanically he ate at intervals. He never slept, and he sat staring through the window for hours at a time, without so much as moving a finger. Towards the end of the journey he remembered his pipe, which afforded him and his strained nerves a small modicum of comfort, and when he stood in Victoria Station he suddenly said aloud: "And there's Richy Dick." A lady who had been watching him curiously as he stood with his hands in his pockets, as though uncertain which way to go or what to do, and with the deepest look of misery she had ever encountered on a human face, smiled at the words. "Richy Dick" sounded cheerful. Perhaps it was a little boy—the son of this unhappy-looking man with the nice face; and she herself felt insensibly cheered.

Smithers received him without any surprise.

"You got my wire, then, sir?"

"Your wire?"

"About Richy Dick. Won't you come in, sir? I've got bad news. I did my best. I hoped you'd be in time, but he's gone, sir."

"Gone!" repeated Wroxham mechanically, walking up the stairs. "Gone where?"

Smithers cleared his throat and looked at his master sideways. In the strong morning light it struck him that he looked very ill. "He's dead, sir; he died a couple of hours ago. I'm sorry."

Wroxham stood with his hand on the balustrade. "Richy Dick dead?"

"Yes, sir; he was ill for two or three days. I had a doctor to him—we did everything we could, but he seemed to pine for you. I got Mr. Charteris to come and whistle to him; he can copy you exact, but Richy Dick wasn't deceived; he knew. He's here, sir, in his old place."

The cage hung in a shaft of bright sunshine. The little bird lay with his tiny head on his breast—a pathetic, wee thing.

"You can leave me, Smithers," said Wroxham.

As the door closed, he opened the cage, and picking up Richy Dick with gentle fingers, for a moment held the downy thing to his cheek as of old; but there was now no responsive delighted pecking at his ear; then, seating himself by the table, he leaned across it with his face bowed on his outstretched arms, and he sat thus for so long, that Richy Dick, had he been alive, would have imagined his master had fallen asleep and wakened him up by breaking into riotous song. But the

silence remained unbroken. Presently he sat back, and in a crooning voice talked to the little bird. "Oh, Richy Dick, Richy Dick, I've nothing left, not even you," he said brokenly; then silence again reigned in the room.

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Patricia fled to the mountains. Once she had come across these lines: "I met dozens of people, imaginative and unimaginative, cultivated and uncultivated, who had come from far countries and roamed through the Swiss Alps year after year—they could not explain why. They had come first, they said, out of idle curiosity—because everybody talked about it; they had come since because they could not help it, and should keep on coming while they lived, for the same reason; they had tried to break their chains and stay away, but it was futile; now they had no desire to break them. Others came nearer formulating what they felt; they said they could find perfect rest and peace nowhere else when they were troubled; all frets and worries and chafings sank to sleep in the presence of the benignant serenity of the Alps; the Great Spirit of the mountain breathed his own peace upon their hurt minds and sore hearts, and healed them; they could not think base thoughts or do mean or sordid things here, before the visible throne of God."

She recalled them now: Would she be able to find healing there for her hurt mind and sore heart? she cried, during the long, wakeful hours of that first

dreadful night after Wroxham's departure. She would try it and see. She wanted to be alone—that at present was her dominant and crying need, *to be alone*. She could not return to England. They, Aunt John and Mary, did not even know of her engagement. She had not written. She had wanted to tell them herself of her great happiness, of her pride and delight in her approaching marriage. How could she explain now; how make them understand her overwhelming misery and the cause of it? She felt, indeed, too tired for explanations, discussions, arguments with anybody. Alone she wanted to fight the thing out, wrestle with her unhappiness, bind up her broken heart (as with youth's extravagance she termed it to herself) as best she could. She had received a shock, as again she put it to herself, unable to see that it was of her own making, and charged with her unworthy and insulting and stupid suspicions, and nothing else. She felt physically and mentally ill.

When Wroxham had left her she experienced a sensation of something having snapped within her. She watched him swing away through the orchard, through the green aisles of pergolas and the garden beyond, without making any effort to recall him. She did not weep, she made no sound. Usually level-headed and able to see things with a clearer vision than the average girl, this fit of temporary insanity (as Miss Ruggles designated it later when she heard the story) had taken possession of her; reason, for the time being, had fled; her love for Wroxham was, if not dead, suspended.

Somehow she got to her feet, and up and down beneath the long, cool, shady pergolas she walked blindly but unerringly. The sweet lush grass that grew so thickly was grateful to her feet, which had become suddenly and strangely tired. Her body, too, was tired; her brain was confused and misty. "He knew, he knew all the time, he never really loved me." These words kept being repeated by some one, she did not think it was herself, for she was not conscious of saying them. She looked about, but saw nobody. Now it seemed that her body was not her own, that it belonged to somebody else, that it was walking beside her and keeping step with her step. "It is strange," said she confusedly, "I wonder. . . ." Presently she noticed it began to sway as something shaken in a wind, and the feet to falter. "It's getting tired," she whispered. Now it stumbled, and she felt herself stumble in sympathy. "Poor thing," she murmured, and this time she gave a funny little laugh, but it was not unkind, she felt sorry for the poor groping, swaying figure, "it will only just reach the fig-tree; it's trying to get there, to the nice soft rug. It is David's fault. . . . He has caused it to suffer so and be so tired. Oh . . . it won't get there in time. . . ." She tottered painfully. "How could he hurt it so, be so cruel. . . ." She fell prone to the ground—a crumpled-up heap.

Miss Ruggles found her there when the darkness was falling and a chill air was creeping up from the lagoon. The faintness had only been of momentary duration, but, wrapping herself up in the rug, she had remained

crouching beneath the fig-tree, her aching head pressed against its trunk. She felt unequal to facing the gay inmates of "Casa Ferolico," the inquisitorial eyes of Mrs. Japp, the kindly solicitude of Miss Ruggles and Mr. Pennant. Mr. Pennant was still here. Because a woman had refused him he was not going to run away, he had informed Patricia the day after he had made his proposal. "Never run away from anything, attack it again," he had said with a pugilistic air, as though speaking of a charging elephant or an advancing regiment of soldiers. So he had remained, Miss Ruggles being in no way abashed by his presence.

"She will worry me, she will ask me questions," thought Patricia shrinkingly, as she watched the grey-clad, sturdy figure advancing through the green gloom of the pergolas; "she is so kind, she will want to help, and she will question me."

But she didn't. Seeing how it was with the girl, she said nothing. The brusque people of this world in the presence of sorrow and trouble are invariably the most tactful and really sympathetic. Now, without a word, she put a strong, capable arm around Patricia, led her to the house, gave her food, lighted a bright wood fire in her room, and put her to bed. Just before she left her, Patricia drew her face down and kissed her. "Thank you," she whispered. "I'm not ungrateful. He," her lips trembled pitifully, "has gone. Gone out of my life for ever. Some day I may be strong enough to tell you, but not to-night."

Now the morning had come, Patricia was all ready packed, within half an hour she would be gone.

She was deaf to Miss Ruggles' entreaties to be allowed to go with her, help her, look after her. The cousin at Nice would have to wait for her if she did, Patricia objected, trying to soften her refusal.

"Let her wait," returned Miss Ruggles grimly.

But Patricia shook her head. "No," said she. "Forgive me, but I must speak plainly. I do not want you. You would try to influence, coerce me, into marrying this man against my better judgment. You would be sure to take his part—you are a woman." Patricia was unaware of the bitterness of her voice.

"I should be in a position either to agree or disagree with that statement if I knew the story, and as to why Mr. Wroxham had so abruptly gone away," she returned drily.

Patricia drummed on the window-panes. Below her lay the garden, with its quaint little statuettes, prim box-edged flower-beds and roses and wistaria running riotously over the enclosing grey stone walls. In the distance she could descry Angelo, in his picturesque blue smock, busy building his wall. She recalled Wroxham's words: "Balbus built a wall," and, with a fierce sensation of pain, she allowed herself to dwell in retrospection on the delights of that first perfect day in Venice. He had been so kind, and so unobtrusively attentive to her—her heart throbbed when she thought of the manner in which he had helped her into the gondola, arranged her cushions, attended to her lightest

need, watched her every movement, listened to her every word. And all the time. . . . Her eyes, smarting with unshed tears, wandered again to the busy Angelo in the orchard with its green shimmer of leaves and pergolas of vine, and to the shining and dreamlike lagoon beyond. How beautiful it all was, how peaceful, how satisfying to the senses when one had been happy! But now—now it brought her nothing but exquisite pain. It was down there that this sorrow had come upon her; it was beneath that fig-tree with its fairy green cups. . . .

“Patricia,” Miss Ruggles’ voice brought her back to the room with a start, “time is passing. Are you going to leave me in ignorance? . . . I don’t want to appear curious, but yet——”

“Yes, yes. It is only fair that you should know. You have been a kind friend, I——” And she told her her story. She told it baldly, without any frills or embellishments, or interpolations of self-pity, or reproaches of Wroxham. She told it as she believed it to be, and she told it briefly, but not briefly enough for the patience of Miss Ruggles to hold out to the end.

“Oh,” she interrupted vehemently, fiercely, with her hands to her ears, “don’t say another word, not one more word, I cannot bear it. To think, to imagine, to conceive the possibility of any girl who is supposed to be sane believing such a thing of this man David Wroxham. It’s unthinkable, it’s preposterous, monstrous. . . . You must be out of your mind—I believe you are.” She examined Patricia critically.

"Very well, perhaps I am. . . ." Patricia looked at her watch-bracelet. "Anyhow, I must go now. Good-bye; Pietro must be at the steps waiting, and I must tell the signorina to summon Angelo to help with the luggage." The weariness of her voice, her lagging footsteps, her drawn white face touched Miss Ruggles in spite of her fierce anger and resentment against the girl. She took her cold hand in both of hers. "Won't you let me come with you and help to get things straight between you?" she pleaded. "Oh, it's dreadful to think of your breaking up your life, ruining your happiness, trampling underfoot your love for this man because of a mad and cruel obsession—I can only call it that. And worse than all, worse than your suffering will be his, because—he is finer than you. Yes, much finer. You must forgive me, but you have proved yourself to be a poorer thing than I thought. And fine human beings have a greater capacity for suffering than those who are made of more earthly and commoner clay. Yet I am more sorry for you of the two because——"

"Yes?"

"Because you are the offender. You are the cause of this suffering falling upon you both. His conscience is clear, he has that to support him, but you—you ought always to walk with your head and eyes down, ashamed to have fallen so low."

"You do not mince matters," said Patricia, but without any trace of anger or resentment. She was too

tired for that. All her passion had burnt itself out the night before.

"This is not the moment to speak honeyed words," said Miss Ruggles desperately. The signorina, Pietro and Angelo were at the door knocking for admittance. In another minute Patricia would be gone. "Oh, my dear, my dear, what have you done? Won't you pause before it's too late? Won't you admit you have made some hideous mistake? I would stake my soul on David Wroxham's honour."

"Good-bye," said Patricia. "There is not time to discuss the matter further." She opened the door, watched her luggage removed, followed Pietro and Angelo down the stairs, through the flagged courtyard, with its cool shadows, to the blinding sunshine and the quay, and then paused irresolute before stepping into the gondola. Miss Ruggles had not come with her, not come to see the last of her and bid her a final good-bye; and now that she was going forth alone she felt strangely desolate. Turning about, she ran back and quickly up the stairs to her old room. A sound of a voice came from within: "Oh God, restore the senses to this fool of a girl who" (the sound of a muffled sob) "wants smacking. Permit the scales to fall from her silly blind eyes, for the sake of the man who loves her; but first humble her in the dust and—bless her."

Feeling a little heartened, Patricia crept softly away.

CHAPTER XXVIII

PATRICIA IN THE "VALLEY OF FLOWERS"

SHE did not find her peace among the mountains. Her "hurt mind" and "sore heart" seemed daily to grow worse, and she was wretched beyond imagination. For hours at night she would kneel at her window, gazing out on to the majestic white solemnity of the Jungfrau, a thing of inconceivable beauty when silvered by the moon or the starlight—she had gone to Mürren—but the healing peace of its benign and mighty presence in no wise touched her troubled heart.

For many days her obsession remained with her; she could not walk it away, sleep it away, think it away. Always it was there, weighing upon her spirits, as the mist clouds settled upon and enveloped in a clinging shroud the summits of the mountains—Jungfrau, Eiger and Mönch. Wroxham had deceived her, she would whisper over and over again to herself through the wakeful hours of the night when, cold from her long vigil by the window, she would at length creep back to bed, pulling the clothes over her head in a childlike endeavour to shut out memory and thought. He had deceived her, he had never loved her. He had asked her to be his wife, but—he had never loved her. He had not even denied her accusations. He had been angry,

certainly, but that was because he had been found out. It never struck her as being curious that a man who felt himself to be guilty should, of his own initiative, have confessed to having known who she was and of her true position. It never struck her that he could have carried on his deception to the end—married her, and then told her that he had known. No; she only saw things through a distorted vision—darkly. Her balance was upset; her usually clear, logical outlook was in abeyance.

She wandered about alone day after day among the mountains, along the lovely flower-clad fields and valleys, nursing her wrongs, heaping up her grievances, speaking to no one, looking at no one; endeavouring to tire her body out, in order that her mind might rest at night. She would start at ten o'clock in the morning, with her lunch in a rucksack, and her tea in a thermos flask, returning only in the evening in time to dress for dinner. Where she had been in the interval she could not have said; she only knew that she had tramped mile after mile, ascended steep slopes, waded knee-deep through fields of flowers, rested by little lonely chalets in remote spots, chanced upon narrow valleys filled with early-flowering gentian, and sometimes lain herself upon the ground in the proximity of a waterfall, grateful for the sound of its cool music, and, for a few brief moments, lost consciousness in sleep.

The visitors at the hotel talked among themselves of the strange, white-faced girl, who sat alone, walked

alone, who spoke to no one, and who was manifestly disturbed if any one addressed a word to her. That she was in deep trouble was obvious. What was it? Those who had leisure on their hands in conjunction with that spirit of curiosity which life in a foreign hotel seems to breed and propagate so prolifically among so many women, speculated quite a good deal about it. They made many advances to her, always to be met with a courteous but firm aloofness.

Aunt John and Mary, divining that she was in some sort of trouble from her brief and toneless letters, begged her to return to them. "We gather you are alone," they wrote, "that your pleasant little party is broken up. We don't like to think of your spending days by yourself in those solitary places. To begin with, the mountains are full of cows" (this Aunt John), "which, in spite of their mild-looking and benevolent eyes and peaceful-sounding and musical bells, are, in reality, often very fierce; indeed, I believe their bells with their endless tinkle, drive them to madness at times; or is it the horse-flies? I've forgotten which; anyhow, I know they *do* go mad, and you might be tossed over a precipice before you knew where you were. . . ." "I think mother's neuritis is imminent" (this Mary). "She is restless and irritable, and can find no book to satisfy and please her just now—says all the modern heroines are too middle-aged and calculating, stop at a certain point just when things are getting really exciting, and refuse to make the final plunge. She frets after you quite a good bit, and talks of you

hourly. Shall I come and fetch you? It's a long journey from Mürren alone. Write and tell us what is the trouble, Pat dear. We feel worried about you. . . ."

Then one day a letter came from Mary, announcing her engagement to Antony Elwick; and for the first time since she left Venice, Patricia smiled from pleasure. It was certainly a rather wan little smile; still, it *was* a smile.

"... He is full of regret and shame whenever he thinks of what he said to you, Patricia dear," was the conclusion of Mary's letter, "and the insult of it. But he knows the largeness of your heart, and so do I; and we live in hope that some day you may be able to forget it and wish us both happiness."

"Wish you both happiness, Marykins!" Patricia replied in her usual impulsive fashion. "You know that I do from the bottom of my heart. If what Antony said to me still rankled a little, it has ceased to do so now, from this moment and for ever, in the knowledge that *you* have been made happy. That he should also be happy is not of such importance to me, for, on the whole, I believe men *are* happier than women, and can find happiness more readily—or put it that they suffer less.

"I had divined your secret when you unnecessarily turned down the wick of the lamp the evening I told you of his proposal to me. I knew then that you loved him—it is not your habit to do things unnecessarily—and my blood boiled with anger, not against him—Antony

—but against Lady Elwick, in whose keen calculating and capable hands he became a man of straw out of his affection for her and desire to please her. Some women are hard and merciless even towards those they most love. . . .” For some reason Patricia’s pen, which had been moving swiftly, paused. “Hard and merciless . . . even towards those they most love.” She read these words over again, and yet again. Then, rising from the table in the writing-room, she passed abstractedly into the lounge and to the front door, and gazed at the mountains with a far-away look in her eyes. “Hard and merciless”—the words drummed in her ears.

“I think,” she said, turning to the waiting, attentive concierge, “I will go up to the Blümenthal; the afternoon is very lovely. Could you lend me a stick?” She had returned to lunch to-day in order to write letters, and still wore her hat. Eagerly the man produced a stick from somewhere—all the servants liked this quiet, wistful-faced young lady—and, at the same time, handed her a letter which had come in by the early afternoon’s post, and a book she had left on her luncheon table. She took them from him with a word of thanks and, passing between the restaurant and tennis-courts, began the winding, steep ascent which led up to the Blümenthal. Presently she came to a small and by no means clean farm-yard, passed through a gate, and again began to ascend. Up, up, she climbed till she came to a path scarce wider than a ribbon and sown on either side with wee purple and yellow pansies,

which, to Patricia, always seemed to wear a pathetically human and wondering expression on their tiny faces, and at length she reached the Blümenthal, or Valley of Flowers, which lay between two high grassy slopes, and which was happily named, for it was indeed a veritable carpet of flowers of brilliant and beautiful and mazy pattern, and through which a stream—just a thread of water—wound a desultory way. At the far end of the valley a small waterfall sprang from cool rocks and laughingly and teasingly flung its sparkling drops at the heads of the blue campanula and sulphur-coloured anemones which grew in such profusion around. A little rustic bridge spanned the stream where it fussily and importantly widened out to the dimensions of a couple of feet, and completed a picture, in its setting of dazzlingly white mountains, well-nigh perfect in its beauty—for few things can surpass in sheer loveliness the combination of snow mountains, raising aloft their giant peaks till lost in the blue of Heaven, and flowers blooming happily and sweetly at their base.

Patricia sat down amongst the anemones and, opening the book she had been carrying, read for the twentieth time this passage: “. . . There was something subduing in the influence of that silent, awful presence” (the Jungfrau); “one seemed to meet the immutable, the indestructible, the eternal, face to face, and to feel the trivial and fleeting nature of his own existence the more sharply by the contrast. One had the sense of being under the brooding contemplation

of a spirit, not an inert mass of rocks and ice—a spirit which had looked down, through the slow drift of ages, upon a million vanished races of men, and judged them, and would judge a million more—and still be there, watching, unchanged and unchangeable, after all life should be gone and the earth have become a vacant desolation. . . .”

“And judged them, and would judge a million more. . . .” Slowly and almost painfully she raised her eyes to the mighty Jungfrau, to experience the sensation of being indeed beneath the brooding contemplation of a spirit. Was she being judged and found wanting? Was she being judged and found to be merciless, hard and without compassion? Wroxham may have done the thing she believed, may have wronged her, may have been cruel to her; but still . . . For long she thought, her eyes on the white magnificence of the mountain, her fingers plucking idly at the anemones at her feet. Day by day, without being conscious of it, the need for Wroxham had been growing within her; her whole nature had been crying out for him, for his love, for his companionship. She craved to touch his hand, to see his face, to hear his voice. She did not know how much she wanted him; but it was there—her crying need of him; indeed, she hungered for him as one hungers for a loved person who has gone over to the “other side,” whose presence has been removed—the mortal side at least for ever. Now it came to her gradually, but surely, that she could not live without him—live in the true meaning of the word. She would

exist—an apathetic, joyless creature; but she would not *live*.

“I must go to him,” she thought. “I must go and say to him: ‘Will you forgive me? I must be honest and tell you I still believe what I thought of you, but I also still love you in spite of it. . . .’ We do love people in spite of their faults . . .” she mused aloud, “or where should we all be? ‘Yes,’ I should say, ‘if you are willing to marry me, knowing that I believe this of you . . . I am ready, for I, myself, love you so much that I find I cannot live without you. . . .’” She paused; her eyes, introspective, troubled, still rested on the glistening peaks piled up in serried ranks against the clear, deep blue of the sky; her hands still played with the flowers at her feet. A soft wind, warmed by the sun, made fresh from its contact with snow, and sweetened with the breath of myriads of flowers, caressed her cheek.

“Oh, if he were but here now!” she cried, looking around. “I think I should find it easier to say what I want to say out here than in a city. . . .” Suddenly her eyes fell upon the letter at her side, which she had forgotten, and which was now half-buried among the flowers. The handwriting on the envelope was unfamiliar to her; opening it, she first glanced at the signature at the end: “Felicity Ruggles,” and her heart gave a little throb of pleasure. This was the first letter she had received from her since their parting in Venice.

"MY DEAR PATRICIA," she wrote,—

"My letter will be brief and to the point, and you will probably not like it. I went to see Mr. Wroxham yesterday—never mind how I obtained his address, it took a bit of nosing out, I can assure you.

"I went in, unannounced, after a fierce passage of arms with a faithful and model servant of the name of Smithers, with a countenance as unimpenetrable and impassive as a black stuff bag. Mr. Wroxham was startled—in fact, distressed by my visit; but with his usual courtesy concealed it with a moderate degree of success. He looked ill and worn, but, with an assumed air of cheerfulness, handed me a chair.

"I went straight to the point of my visit, which means without any tactful 'leading up' I began to talk of you. I won't repeat what I said, because you'd be very offended. He was a little startled at first—cold, distant, non-committal, and had I been of a sensitive disposition and not cared for you both so much, I should have been rebuffed and departed right away.

"As it was, I stuck to my guns, and at the end of an hour's time I had discovered the following facts: This man fell in love with you at first sight—can't imagine why! for you were crying, then you were laughing in hysterical fashion and flinging oranges on to the line to relieve your feelings. He became interested in your movements, and followed you to Mentone after destroying a ticket to Taormina, to which place he was originally going—and you appear to have worried him no end about his baggage ticket, which was, of

course, made out to Taormina, and which he naturally did not wish you to know.

"Arrived at Mentone, he tramped up and down the mule-track—he had seen you get into the 'Bella Vista' omnibus, so knew where you were staying—in the hope of meeting you, till his boots were worn to shreds and his temper as frayed as the edge of a saw. You know the rest. Then, of course, it was no accident your meeting again in Venice. He was in Cook's on the afternoon we purchased our tickets. Inadvertently you dropped the slip of paper bearing the address: 'Casa Ferolico, the Giudecca, Venice.' He put two and two together, being by no means a dull man, with the result that on our arrival we found him already installed there.

"In addition, I succeeded in wringing from him the fact that he has an abundance of this world's goods—indeed, has plenty of money, which he makes out of—but no, that part of his story I will leave him to tell you himself.

"Now, does it, in the light of these facts, still appear to you possible, let alone probable, that he should be a mere fortune-hunter? If you are, after reading this, now able to believe in the honesty and disinterested affection of Mr. Wroxham, you should bow your proud head and humble yourself in the dust before him—and I think you will if you are made of the stuff I imagine you to be.

"I don't say he will forgive you. . . . I know I shouldn't—at least, not all in a minute.

"I enclose you his address in case you don't know it; and in spite of everything and all your wayward stupidity,

"I remain,

"Your warmly affectionate friend,

"FELICITY RUGGLES.

"P.S.—One good word I put in for you: I told him I thought he had not acted quite fairly in keeping you in the dark as to his true position. He replied he had been about to tell you when you hurled your thunderbolt in his face, knocking him flat and taking the words out of his mouth."

Patricia sat very still after reading this letter—so strangely still, that a brilliant blue butterfly ventured to settle for a moment on her white gown and even on the saffron anemones she held in her hands. Then slowly the colour began to mount to her pale cheeks and the light to her eyes, and she trembled deliciously in every limb.

"Oh!" she said at length. "So he has loved me all along," and a laugh, tremulously joyous, escaped her lips, and the blue butterfly, startled, fluttered hurriedly away. Then she rose to her feet. . . . She must go to him, she must go to him at once. At present no shame for her treatment of him entered into her thoughts or marred her happiness; she was irradiated with joy and gladness.

Swiftly she walked through the flowers and across the grass, seeking the little path. This found, she be-

gan to run, and she laughed as she ran; she almost danced, she almost sang aloud.

"Oh, that he were here now," she sighed for the second time that afternoon, "and that the long journey was over!" And as she contemplated its length, her feet insensibly quickened, her dress brushing the flowers with a soft shr-r as she sped along. And then, as it seemed to her, a miracle happened: raising her eyes from the lovely carpet at her feet as she began to mount the slope before the descent into Mürren, she saw Wroxham advancing to meet her, advancing with swift strides, and she stood still, scarcely believing it could be true.

"It is a vision," she thought, "a vision that will fade away."

But it was Wroxham indeed—a very material man, coming with strong, swift strides nearer and nearer to her. . . . And now he stood before her.

"Is it really you?" she asked, half holding out her hands to him—flowers and all.

"It is really I," said he, taking them in both of his.

"I—I was just coming to you," she said a little shakily. "I—I was running as fast as I could. There is a funicular down at five o'clock and—I was anxious to catch it. I wanted to ask you to forgive me . . . suddenly I felt I must go to you. . . ."

"And I was first," said he, looking down gravely into her upturned, tremulous face.

"Yes," she replied, "you are first, and always will be; for you are kinder than I, David—stronger, finer.

You will always get there first. . . . You——” Suddenly her eyes brimmed with tears, and he, with his arms around her, gently wiped them away.

“Always,” said Wroxham, “we seem to be in such wide and open—in fact, public places, when I want——”

“To talk to me,” suggested Patricia.

“Er—exactly,” he smiled.

“Across the bridge that spans the immense stream of this ‘Valley of Flowers,’ and over on the other side of that gently-rising slope, there is a little quiet place filled with early-flowering gentians,” said Patricia demurely; “but the hour . . .”

“The hour is not late,” said he, “and the little quiet place sounds as though it might exactly meet my requirements. Let us go, sweetheart.”

So they went.

CHAPTER XXIX

EXIT WROXHAM; ENTER WRAYSBURY

“**A**ND now,” said he—a full half-hour had gone by, which must be sacred to them, and the moment had arrived when Wroxham felt he must make his own confession to her, and the prospect of it filled him with no little misgiving and a curious nervous sinking at the heart—“Now,” said he, “I—I have something to confess to you, something I ought to have told you about long ago, but . . .”—fiercely he pulled at his old disreputable pipe—“but—well, I didn’t. Will you be very angry with me, I wonder?”

“I shall never be angry with you again,” said Patricia, with youth’s unquenchable optimism. “It is you that will browbeat and bully me in the future.”

He laughed. “Of course,” said he, “I forgot. Well, do you remember a little sketch we saw at ‘Casa Ferolico,’ a sketch of a boy about to dive from a gondola——”

“Which Mr. Sheepshanks showed to us, and which I admired so much?” interrupted Patricia.

“Exactly. Well, do you happen to recollect Sheepshanks saying that only one man in his opinion could have painted that picture?”

“Of course—David Wraybury.”

"Well, I—painted it." He was now emitting positive clouds of smoke from his lips.

"*You!*" she laughed. "So Mr. Sheepshanks was wrong."

"No, he was right."

Patricia screwed round her neck—he had her sitting very close to him—and looked into his eyes. "I don't understand."

"It is quite easy," said he, with extreme nonchalance. "I am David Wraysbury. My name isn't Wroxham—at least, it's only my second name."

"*You* are David Wraysbury! You——" There was a long pause, and once again the colour poured into Patricia's face and neck, and then drained away, leaving her as white as the narcissus on the slopes. "You are the great David Wraysbury?"

"Only great in the sense that I have won your love, dear one."

But she did not hear him, her thoughts were moving swiftly. "The great David Wraysbury, whom not only England, but Europe acclaims?"

He said nothing.

"Oh!" she cried, and she looked at him almost challengingly; "it—it cannot be possible."

He stared at the ground and mechanically felt for his tobacco, whilst a silence fell between them.

"And I told you your foreground was wrong." Her voice was a wail and her face was full of shame.

He refilled his pipe.

"And that your sketch of me resembled one of the innocuous things by Rose Martindale."

"It was good for my soul," and he could not forbear a chuckle of amusement.

"And I patronised you all along. I—I patronised and criticised the work of David Wraysbury."

"I loved it—every bit of it. I had run away from the others—the adulators, the flatterers—they bored me to tears. When you found fault with my middle distance I could have shouted for joy."

"What must you have thought of me——?" Now she was nearly weeping.

"I told you when I asked you to be my wife, beloved one. Do you want me to tell you over again—are you so vain?" He looked banteringly into her eyes.

"Don't tease me," she whispered. "David, I am covered with shame; and I—I accused you of wanting to marry me for my money, for my position——"

"We are not going into all that again," he cried with horror. "I thought that was finished with, wiped out. Women *will* so rake things up—such a tiresome habit of theirs," and he fell to grumbling.

"Never again shall I be able to lift up my head," she asserted.

"In the meanwhile couldn't you put it here?" he suggested.

.....
"So we have each of us played our part," she sighed presently.

"We have; and I flatter myself I carried mine out better than you carried yours."

"I don't agree with you," she said coldly.

"But look at your frocks and hats and—and all your fal-lals; and the hotel, for instance, at which you are now residing," he said mockingly.

"I am paying eight francs a day at that hotel, and still do my own washing," said Patricia stiffly.

"The Hôtel National for eight francs a day!"

"I got round the manager, who is a nice, kind man, and who saw, on my arrival, that I was tired and hungry and in no fit state to go wandering about the place in search of a cheap *pension*."

Wraysbury laughed and whistled softly to himself.

"Which do you like me best as—poor Patricia whom you first knew, or rich Patricia?" she asked after a while, as they sat and watched the sun sink behind the white mountains, and the little flowers close their pretty eyes, and the lovely pink of the Alpen glow begin to creep into the sky.

"Both," he returned promptly.

"We must leave to-morrow," she said, as hand in hand they left the "Valley of Flowers" and began the steep descent to Mürren.

"Why?" inquired Wraysbury.

She blushed a little. "Because—I'm not a prude, but——"

"Oh, I forgot to tell you Miss Ruggles was here," he said placidly. "I left her scolding the concierge for his

not knowing by exactly which route you had gone to the Blümenthal."

"Miss Ruggles here, in Mürren! How many more surprises are you going to spring upon me? I *am* glad." Her gay laughter sounded along the slopes and down in the valleys, and was taken up by all the little echoing sprites lurking among the mountain-tops.

CHAPTER XXX

THE RETURN OF PATRICIA

“**S**HE ought to be here in ten minutes or less, I’m feeling quite excited,” said Mrs. Moffat as she closed her book (one that had been affording her complete satisfaction this long sultry afternoon, inasmuch as the heroine of the story had emerald green eyes, auburn hair and an alluring habit of holding a red rose between her scarlet lips—Mrs. Moffat loved her heroines to nibble at the stalks of red roses when the heroes were prone on the floor in ecstasies of passionate love-making). Her looks belied her words. Any one less excited in demeanour and attitude it would have been difficult to conceive: she lay in a capacious lounge chair beneath a shady tree on the velvety, closely-shaven lawn in front of Patricia’s house; her feet rested on a substantial footstool; a handkerchief—placed there as a protection from the onslaught of many and peculiarly virulent mosquitoes—partially concealed her hair, forehead and left eye; her hands, which she cherished for their whiteness, encased in a pair of cotton gloves whose fingers, being somewhat long and turning up at the ends, reminded her, she had just informed Mary, of that “dear Sugar in ‘The Bluebird,’” lay folded in her lap. Her head rested against some heaped-up silken

cushions, the one eye that could see gazed at a bumble-bee droning in and out of the bells of a foxglove. Altogether a look of benign placidity pervaded her entire person.

Mary glanced at her watch. "Yes, it's twenty minutes to six. If the train were punctual, she should be here at a quarter to ; and there's Nanny hovering around the front door like an excited bluebottle; she's been doing a sort of ragtime the whole of the day. Blinks, too, knows there's something in the air. Blinks, your mistress will be here in a minute or two. I wonder why she didn't want us to meet her." Mary folded up her needlework with a thoughtful little frown between her eyebrows.

"Another of her eccentricities, I suppose. Dear Patricia is really not a bit like other girls——" Aunt John with unwonted celerity of movement succeeded in clapping a voracious mosquito between the white-gloved palms of her hands. "She went alone and she wishes to return alone."

"H'm," said Mary, "I wonder if she will."

"Will what?"

"Return alone."

"Of course she will. Who on earth could she be returning with? That Miss Ruggles left her quite a little while ago."

Mary smiled enigmatically. "We shall see."

Aunt John had been surreptitiously preparing herself for a five minutes' nap before the arrival of Patricia, who was always a little strenuous, but Mary's words now

caused her to open her drooping eyelids suddenly. Mary said such remarkable things and made such remarkable discoveries, just like those frightfully clever chemists and bacteriologists who did things in laboratories and made startling discoveries about the dangerous habits of house flies. What had she got up her sleeve now? Mrs. Moffat removed the corner of the handkerchief from her left eye to command a clearer view of her daughter.

"You will remember how happy Patricia's letters were at the beginning?"

Mrs. Moffat nodded.

"And then how depressed?"

"Yes, but I put that down to the foreign food and only having rolls for breakfast—only rolls for breakfast *must* tell in time. To be cut off from bacon and eggs is almost as bad as being cut out of a will." In her earnestness Mrs. Moffat allowed a mosquito to get one home on her right ankle, and, in the subsequent plunge she made she nearly fell out of her chair. Peace and order restored, Mary continued: "But now Patricia's letters are suddenly bright again, almost radiant, in fact, they've been this last week."

Mrs. Moffat sat and considered this.

"Perhaps she's seen a doctor," she said at length. "I remember an old friend of your father once consulted one of those foreign doctors—who are really surprisingly clever—and he said: 'Monsieur, it's the *plâts*, the number of them—nothing at the beginning of the

day, and too much at the end. It does not suit you English people——”

“But Patricia’s not like that,” interrupted Mary, “and I believe I hear the car,” the colour mounted to her cheeks as she spoke. She felt unduly excited about the coming of Patricia. She, herself, was so happy that she desired above all things that her dearly-beloved cousin should be happy too. The thought of a depressed Patricia, an uncheerful Patricia, filled her with consternation.

The landaulet could now be discerned through the leafy canopy of elm trees which magnificently, and in a straight and unbroken phalanx, bodyguarded either side of the drive. Nearer it drew, smoothly, purringly.

Aunt John got out of her chair and drew from her hands her long-fingered gloves. “Why, there are two people in it,” she cried excitedly, “and—one is a man. Yes, a man, and such a nice man too, and—why, bless my soul, he’s got Patricia’s—— Yes, he’s actually holding Patricia’s left hand.”

“I told you so,” said Mary triumphantly. “That man, mother, is our Patricia’s future husband, and what a dear he looks, nearly as nice as Antony.”

Later, the two girls walked in the dim sweet-scented garden beneath shadowy yew trees. Their bare necks and arms gleamed palely, the night was too hot for wraps. Patricia was telling Mary her story. Mrs. Moffat, away on the terrace in front of the house, was trying delicately to convey to Wraybury that his luck

in having secured her niece was nothing short of extraordinary: which delighted David, and to which he most heartily agreed.

"Your life will never be what one might describe as a placid one. Patricia is—well, a little jumpy."

Wraysbury laughed. "I know," he spoke with conviction.

"Still it's better, perhaps, than being dull." Aunt John's own husband had lived by rule, followed out with clockwork regularity. He was a man who daily checked the temperature of his bath with a thermometer. When the habit had become a fixed one Aunt John gave in; she ceased to expect either an amusing or varied existence so long as John Moffat lived. And he died, poor man, as methodically as he had lived. The doctors gave him a month from the time he took to his bed, he passed away to the very day.

"But she's a heart of gold," said Mrs. Moffat sentimentally. She had felt sentimental from the moment Wraysbury's cigar had banished the mosquitoes. "When,—how soon did you fall in love with her, if you don't mind my asking you?" Conversationally she drew a little closer to him.

Wroxham told her his story, and Aunt John was frankly delighted. This was better even than any romance by Miriam Flynn. She fell to thinking about it, and as concentrated thought in conjunction with a comfortable arm-chair invariably had a soporific effect upon Mrs. Moffat, when she had dined, her head began to nod a little, and her remarks became a trifle disjointed.

And, presently, seeing how it was with her, Wraysbury deemed it kinder to steal away and search for Patricia.

He saw the gleam of her white gown at the end of the long yew walk. She was talking earnestly to Mary. He dropped into a rustic seat and smoked till she had finished. He could not hear her words, only the murmur of her voice; but he liked watching the sway of her slight figure, the poise of her head, the movement of her hands. She did not see him, nor had she heard his approach; she was apparently absorbed in her subject. This is what she was saying:

“You ask me if I am *sure*, if I’m quite *certain*——” (she had not seen the twinkle in Mary’s eyes in the half light) “that I’m not making a mistake. Listen. At first I loved David *because* he loved me. I believe a woman often loves that way at the beginning. She is in love with love, in love with being loved. I did not want to do things for David, I wanted him to do them for me. I loved to be fussed over, to be waited upon, to be taken care of. Then, when I thought I had lost him, when I sent him away because I believed he did not really love me, it came to me gradually, slowly but insistently, that *I* myself loved *him* so much that I could not live without him. That his not loving me did not matter so much, that it could be borne, could perhaps be overcome, and that I would marry him, if he were still willing. Now, that is love, Mary,” there was something rather fine and splendid in the way in which Patricia threw back her head as she said this, “it is the

way we women ought to love. It is not the way of the new woman," a smile curved her lips, "but it is the only way, I'm sure. Now—now I want to do things for David. I want badly to do things. I want to darn his socks, to brush his clothes, to take care of him—for like all really nice men David's not a bit grown up—I'd almost like him to be ill so that I could cosset and nurse him. I'd love to put poultices on him and comb and brush his nice hair and give him his medicine and——" Patricia broke off abruptly. Mary had given a little gurgle of laughter, but I'm not sure it was not to hide a little sob which for some unaccountable reason had suddenly come to her throat.

"Yes," she said, "go on."

"You are laughing at me." Patricia sounded hurt.

"Laughing! If I am it is from sympathy, from understanding of what you are saying. For you are expressing, putting into words just what I feel about Antony. The other day he was thrown from his horse, he was not much hurt—only a bruise or two, but—well, I tended those bruises. . . ."

"Yes? I know. I—I should love David to have bruises. What I mean is . . ." She broke off. They both laughed happily. "Sometimes I find myself wishing David had been a poor man—a working man and that I had no money, so that I could scrub floors for him, cook for him, carry his dinner to him tied up in a red handkerchief. I think how splendid it would be, how fine to be able to prove my love for him," unconsciously she raised her voice on the last words and

David, waxing impatient, and who was now coming towards them down the path, heard them. At first he hurried his footsteps, then he paused, but Patricia had seen him.

"Did you hear what I said?" she asked quickly.

"I, no, yes. What I mean is I couldn't help it. I'm very sorry. Your voice carries. I—I didn't want to hear, believe me, dear." He struck a match for his pipe.

But Patricia's pride had gone in these days. She'd had enough of pretending, of playing a part. She loved David from the bottom of her soul and she was not ashamed of his knowing it.

"I don't mind," said she, slipping her hand into his arm.

"I wonder," said he, as his hand closed over hers, "if you meant what you said, or if it was only talk."

"Of course I did. I never just 'only talk.'" She was highly indignant.

"You would like to be able to prove your affection for me—no, don't go, Miss Moffat, I require a witness."

"Y—es," said Patricia.

"Well, marry me this day month, instead of keeping me waiting for three."

"Oh, I couldn't."

"Why not?" He struck another match.

"There is so much to be done, there are so many things to see to."

"What sort of things?"

"Oh, all kinds of things, buying clothes, there is my trousseau, you know."

"We could buy and order everything you require in a couple of days. I'm awfully quick in shops. I would help you."

She laughed. "Thanks."

"Anything else?"

"There are the invitations to send out, banns to be published."

"Surely it wouldn't take more than a month to do that?" he said imperturbably.

"No, but——"

He led her to the seat and again entreated Mary not to go.

"You see," said he, meditatively pulling at his pipe—the old black one, "you can't bring me my dinner tied in a red handkerchief till we are married, it wouldn't be proper, and three months is a deuce of a time to wait if you're really keen on it, and I could arrange it all so well. I would go out sketching—say in a field, or in a nice shady lane—one of my innocuous little sketches. . . ."

She made no sign.

"I'm sorry, sweetheart," he whispered. "Forgive me. Then, at twelve o'clock, twelve o'clock is the correct time for a workman's dinner, you would come along with the red handkerchief, and a tin can——"

"What would that be for?"

"Why, to make some coffee. We would boil it on a

wood fire. I make lovely coffee out of doors on wood fires."

Patricia's eyes sparkled in the darkness. She adored picnics.

"But we could do all that in three months' time."

"No, we couldn't," he shook his head despondently. "It would be autumn. It nearly always rains in the autumn when you want to pretend it's summer. We should have to have luncheon at 1.30 in a house with two men in livery at our elbows."

"Oh," said Patricia.

"What do *you* think, Miss Moffat?" Wraysbury turned to Mary and looked at her urgently.

"I think a summer wedding much nicer than an autumn one. For one thing, nobody knows what to wear in the autumn and everybody looks dowdy. I, myself, am to be married next month." Mary could not keep the little thrill of happiness out of her voice.

"Oh, are you?" murmured Patricia.

"Yes, on the eighteenth."

"I think the eighteenth is a most attractive date for a wedding," said Wraysbury decisively; "it's not too early and it's not too late. It has, now I come to think of it, as a date, always peculiarly appealed to me."

"And the church would be large enough," said Mary.

"For what?" inquired Patricia.

"For the guests."

"I'm quite sure it would," said Wraysbury, "village churches in these days are always designed with an eye to the village eventually developing into a town, and

a double wedding is a first-rate idea. Everybody, when not staring at the brides, would look at Mr. Elwick, and I should escape."

"You'd do nothing of the kind," said Patricia hotly. "You're quite as good-looking——" She stopped; Mary and David were manfully checking their laughter.

"Well, to prove that I am as engaging in appearance as Mr. Elwick, which I very much doubt, if he is the big man now coming along the path accompanied by Mrs. Moffat, won't you be quick and say that you will marry me on the eighteenth of next month, beloved girl?"

"Very well," agreed Patricia, "though I'm sure it's against my better judgment."

"That doesn't matter. You will recollect, perhaps, that you once said you would, in future, always look up to me. This seems a suitable moment to begin, for my judgment on this point is very sound, it's so sound that nothing will shake or weaken it. It's much sounder than yours, in fact."

"I see," said Patricia; "then there doesn't seem much sense in arguing about it."

"None whatever," he agreed warmly. He stooped and kissed her hand under cover of the darkness.

L'ENVOI

A FEW months later the Wraysburys were in receipt of the following letter from Miss Ruggles:

“I saw your advertisement in to-day’s *Telegraph*. I know it is yours, because the world could not contain two other quite such dear, foolish and altruistic persons as you.

“So you are going to befriend a dozen impecunious, lonely ladies and give them a holiday abroad, transporting them from the fog and rain and mud (and to-day it is like train-oil) of London to the blessed sunshine of the South.

“How you will be imposed upon! It makes me smile when I think of it, as well as weep. Don’t you think you had better allow me to interview each of these unscrupulous ladies for you? It will save a lot of trouble and wailing and gnashing of teeth later on. Reading between the lines, I have at last solved the mystery of the Fairy Godmother who was the means of giving me that heavenly time in Venice. Bless your kind heart, Patricia child!

“I met Mr. Pennant in the Strand the other day; he was in the near neighbourhood of the Lotus boot-shop, dreaming, I suppose, of the land of the Pharaohs.

He had two large holes in his socks—his trousers being turned up quite a foot from the ground, the public got a good view of them; and not only were his heels holey but they were blistered. My impulse, which arose from pure philanthropy, was to marry him right away in order to attend to them; but, on reflection, I considered a little 'new skin' or collodion would be more really efficacious than a wife; so I told him what to do.

"He goes to Egypt in two or three days' time, and his sister with him, to a place called Dêr-al-Baharî, in search of the tomb of his grandfather Amen-Hotep II., where his own sarcophagus lies.

"Your affectionate friend,

"FELICITY RUGGLES.

"P.S. (later). I went round to the Pennants' rooms this evening to see if I could give them a hand with their packing. Chaos reigned! I found eleven pairs of socks undarned, no woollen underclothing, the landlady was drunk, a faint disintegrating odour of departed meals hung about the house, and the sister was weeping softly at her own helplessness. Mr. Pennant, seated on a trunk, with the Hoaxe endeavouring not to slide off his knee, was reading aloud extracts from the latest work on Egyptology by M. Lafayette, to which Miss Pennant paid not the slightest attention, being far more interested as to the whereabouts of a late, lethargic and senile-sounding bluebottle.

"I got them packed, mended, labelled, opened the windows, flung a can of water over the landlady, killed

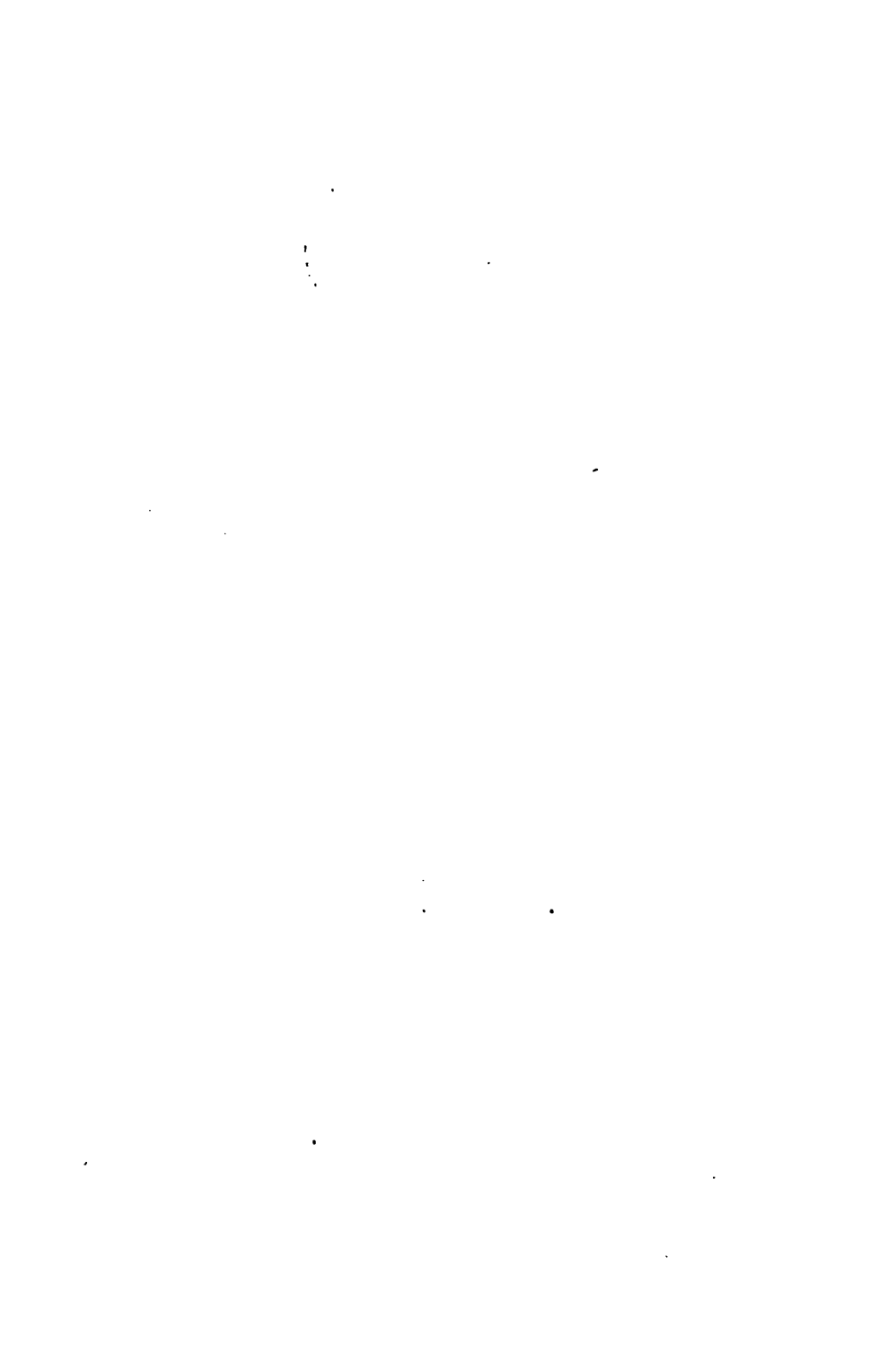
the bluebottle, and scolded Mr. Pennant for dressing in winter like a fairy in a ballet.

“P.P.S. (still later). I forgot to say I’m going to Egypt with them—my relation at Hampstead has recently died and has left me a sum which, when we get a stable Government once more, will bring me in about three hundred a year. I’m *not* going as Mrs. Pennant—still keeping my head! but Mr. P. had actually bought colchicum for collodion, and, what is more, had rubbed it on to his heels. A man like that wants looking after!

“I hope if we tumble across the disembodied spirit of Tatum-Khipa she will not resent my presence. Farewell.

“F. R.”

THE END



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